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Present Shock in Late Fifth-Century Greece

Francis M. Dunn

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PRESS
ANN ARBOR

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Published in the United States of America by
The University of Michigan Press
Manufactured in the United States of America

♻️Printed on acid-free paper

2010 2009 2008 2007 4 3 2 1

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A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dunn, Francis M.

Present shock in late fifth-century Greece / Francis M. Dunn.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-472-11616-4 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-472-11616-9 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Greek literature—History and criticism. 2. Time in literature. I. Title.

PA3014.T56D86 2008

881'.0109—dc22

2007023392

ISBN13 978-0-472-02561-9 (electronic)

Contents

Abbreviations
Acknowledgments

Introduction

CHAPTER 1
Civic Time

CHAPTER 2
Human Time

CHAPTER 3
Present Situations:
Euripides

CHAPTER 4
The Strategic Present:
Thucydides

CHAPTER 5
The Heuristic Present:
Medical Science

Epilogue

Notes
Works Cited
Passages Cited
Index

Abbreviations

AJP: *American Journal of Philology*

B-T: Blass, F., and T. Thalheim, eds. *Antiphon: Orationes et Fragmenta*. Stuttgart, 1914.

ClAnt: *Classical Antiquity*

CQ: *Classical Quarterly*

D-K: Diels, H., and W. Kranz. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 3 vols. Berlin, 1952.

FGrH: Jacoby, F. *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. 15 vols. Berlin, 1923–58.

G&R: Greece and Rome

GRBS: Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies

HSCP: Harvard Studies in Classical Philology

JHS: *Journal of Hellenic Studies*

LSJ: Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. S. Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, with revised supplement. Oxford, 1996.

MusHelv: *Museum Helveticum*

PCPS: *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*

REG: *Revue des Études Grecques*

RhM: *Rheinisches Museum*

SPAW: *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Berlin

SVF: von Arnim, J., ed. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. 4 vols. Leipzig, 1924.

TAPA: *Transactions of the American Philological Association*

TrGF: Snell, B., R. Kannicht, and S. Radt. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. 4 vols. to date. Göttingen, 1977–86.

WS: *Wiener Studien*

YCS: *Yale Classical Studies*

Any idiot can face a crisis.

It's this day-to-day living that wears you out.

—Anton Chekhov

Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK HAS occupied me for many years and in that time has encountered obstacles of many kinds, which I shall not rehearse here. It has also been helped along in many ways, of which I mention just a few. The National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Council of Learned Societies both granted fellowships that greatly assisted my research. The Interdisciplinary Humanities Center and Academic Senate at the University of California, Santa Barbara, both gave awards that provided research assistance. Saul Morson generously offered advice and encouragement at an early stage of this project, as did Ruth Scodel at a later one. Christine Maisto, my research assistant, helped to make the following pages clear and readable.

Introduction

NEAR THE END of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Strepsiades finds that his plan has backfired. He wanted his son Pheidippides to study at the Thinkery and, by learning newfangled skills in logic and rhetoric, be able to win any argument and so avoid paying their debts. The plan backfires when Pheidippides learns his lessons too well and turns the tables not only on the creditors but also on his own father. When the chorus of *Clouds* asks Strepsiades how things took this turn for the worse, he explains that it all began when he asked his son to recite some Aeschylus.

And you know what he replied? That he considered Aischylos "a poet of colossal stature:"—Yup, "the most colossal, pretentious, pompous, spouting, bombastic bore in poetic history."

I was so damn mad I just about went through the roof. But I gritted my teeth together, mustered up a sick smile and somehow managed to say, "All right, son, if that's how you feel, then sing me a passage from one of those highbrow modern plays you're so crazy about." So he recited—you can guess—Euripides! One of those slimy tragedies where, so help me, there's a brother who screws his own sister!

Well, Ladies, *that* did it! I jumped up, blind with rage, started cursing at him and calling him names, and he started screaming and cursing back and before I knew it, he hauled off and—*wham!*—he biffed me and bashed me and clipped me and poked me and choked me and... (*Clouds* 1365–76)¹

This domestic squabble between Strepsiades and Pheidippides recalls many of the issues that divided Athenians in the late fifth century: on the one hand stood respect for the past and for traditional values and forms of authority; on the other hand was an interest in novelty and in new literary and moral values, including—most shocking of all—a defiant rejection of paternal authority. Much of this conflict is familiar today. We as readers have experienced rapidly changing times; some of us are old enough to have lived through the 1960s, with their equally shocking rejection of authority. My choice of translation here—William Arrowsmith's deliberately modern version of *Clouds*, published in 1962—is meant to bring out this familiarity. Yet while the upheavals in the 1960s also involved rejecting traditional forms of

authority, the effect was substantially different: the social and technological changes and the violent, potentially cataclysmic nature of those changes produced a state of disorientation that in 1970 Alvin Toffler named “future shock.” By this he meant that people were forced to confront the future without adequate preparation insofar as they were unable to keep up with or make sense of the rate of cultural change.²

Changes in late fifth-century Athens were in their own way, I argue, just as rapid and potentially cataclysmic; they included a revolution in 411 and military catastrophes in 413 and 404, as well as the major cultural and intellectual upheavals to which Aristophanes alludes. Yet rather than “future shock,” these changes produced what I call “present shock,” whereby the magnitude and speed of change severs ties with the authority of the past, immersing individuals in a disorienting present. How can I navigate these stormy seas, Strepsiades might have asked, without the ballast of traditional values to keep my ship steady?

Whereas Strepsiades found comfort in the past, his modern counterparts instead found it in models of long-term change that seemed relatively steady and progressive: Charles Darwin, for example, attempted not only to explain how species evolved in the past but also to demonstrate that the same mechanisms would generate evolution along such lines into the future, and Karl Marx offered not only a diagnosis of the rise of capitalism and its attendant evils but also a prognosis of how the dialectic of power would continue. While neither of these models was deterministic, each situated the present individual or society within an intelligible trajectory from past to future. Precisely how we make our way from past to present to future became over time increasingly contested as first modernism and then postmodernism complicated and finally splintered these “grand narratives”;³ nevertheless the premise of these critiques—the *arché* they seek to deconstruct—is the *Introduction* 3 presence of a larger trajectory. Toffler indicates one particular way in which the inherited trajectory became problematic, as the future seemed to hurtle down upon the present.

Fifth-century Athens neither inherited such a trajectory nor was burdened, as E. R. Dodds notes, with the modern concept of progress in which discoveries form “a continuous ladder of ascent...extending into the present and the future.”⁴ Archaic Greek culture looked instead to the past for its models and values, situating the present not so much on a linear continuum stretching indefinitely into past and future as in a belated or postlapsarian position after the generations of gods and

heroes.⁵ This is not to say that the relation of the present to the past was uncomplicated or uncontested. Archaic literature turned to the heroic world not only in the spirit of emulation but also in a spirit of rivalry, striving to appropriate or challenge the authority of the past. In the sixth and fifth centuries, however, this situation changed as the focus of interest began to shift to the present, and the locus of authority came to reside less in the heroic past and more in present human experience. For example, whereas archaic historiography began with the earliest generations of heroes, Herodotus and Thucydides after him excluded mythical events from the *spatium historicum*, narrating only those more recent events for which they were willing to vouch.⁶ Similarly, the visual arts began to commemorate not just scenes and figures from myth but such recent events as the Battle of Marathon (which was painted in the Stoa Poikile) and such contemporary individuals of prominence as the “tyrant slayers” Harmodius and Aristogeiton.⁷ Tragedy, by contrast, retained the mythic plots of the past but used them to represent the debates and deliberations of individuals in the present. Jean-Pierre Vernant puts it this way:

By being set on stage, they are made to seem present, characters truly there, although at the same time they are portrayed as figures who cannot possibly be there since they belong to somewhere else, to an invisible beyond. What the public sees before it in the theater is not a poet recounting the trials withstood in ancient times by men now gone whose absence is, so to speak, implied by the very narration. Instead, those trials take place before its very eyes, adopting the form of real existence in the immediacy of the performance.⁸

The fifth century’s break with traditional authority would be followed by new models of order in the fourth century. Human experience, no longer anchored in the presence of gods and the example of heroes, would eventually become grounded in immanent forms establishing what we might call a “timeless present.” In philosophy, the absolute forms of Plato, Aristotle’s concept of innate teleology, and the providential order of the Stoics all give a timeless order to the uncertainties of present experience. In fourth-century ideology, it is the solid virtues of the democratic polis that give a timeless order to the actions of its citizens; as Nicole Loraux observes of this period, “the funeral oration reveals an ever more imaginary installation of the city in a time that is ever more timeless.”⁹ Before this, however, Athenians in the late fifth century felt the “present shock” of Strepsiades—his sense of radical disorientation at living in a present no longer shaped and given meaning by the authority of the past.

I have painted these developments in broad strokes in order to provide a context for the following literary case studies from the late

fifth century. Although attention to the present developed throughout the fifth century, I am nevertheless especially interested in those later works that push this focus on the present furthest, cutting it free from a necessary connection to the past and using new techniques to articulate the unique challenges of living in it. The *Oresteia*, for example, illustrates an ideological turning point that occurred at midcentury. The trilogy as a whole represents key events from the mythical past: namely, the immediate aftermath of the Trojan War and the victorious return of the Greek commander. As the human issues of jealousy and revenge take center stage, the gods of both the upper and lower worlds attempt to exert their control, but in the end, it is the present world of Athens and its judicial procedures that bring about a resolution. In this case, however, the present is represented not so much literally as symbolically, through the enactment of a trial in which the main parties are not Athenians but Apollo, Orestes, the Furies, and Athena; and the effect of the closing scenes, in which divine blessings are granted by Athena and the Holy Ones, is to endow this image of the present with religious authority. In the works of Sophocles and Euripides, by contrast, the balance has shifted. The gods are largely excluded from the drama onstage, while mythical figures enact, as Vernant points out, contemporary issues and conflicts. I am particularly concerned with those plays of Euripides that take this present focus further, exploring the hesitations, confusions, and indecisions involved in human experience. For example, when Medea wavers back and forth, first deciding to kill her children in order to punish Jason, then choosing to spare them, then wavering back and forth again, or when Orestes is startled by the totally unexpected entrance of Pylades (*Orestes* 728) who now suggests entirely new possibilities for escape, the drama represents an uncertain present in which humans must nevertheless make choices and take action.

This interest in representing the present on its own terms often requires new narrative techniques, especially those that suggest indeterminacy by leading the listener or reader to feel that events are free to develop in various directions. A pair of examples illustrates this point. The first is Homer's account of the chariot race in the funeral games for Patroclus (*Iliad* 23), one of the most exciting narrative pieces in Greek literature that, for all its suspense and high drama, ends up confirming the listener's expectations. In Homer's world, the fortunes of sport are like those of war—that is to say, exciting and unpredictable in the short term, but in the end governed by a larger order. After Achilles announces the prizes for the race, no fewer than five heroes step forward in the order of their rank as charioteers:

Eumelus (“who excelled in horsemanship,” 289), Diomedes, Menelaus, Antilochus, and finally Meriones (mentioned in line 351 almost as an afterthought). The account that follows is gripping because the race unfolds in a contrary manner: the two favorites stumble; Diomedes drops his lash, and Eumelus crashes with a broken axle.¹⁰ Diomedes recovers and goes on to win the race, but Eumelus, the favorite, comes in last, while Antilochus, challenging Menelaus with a reckless maneuver, manages to overtake him. The spectators are stunned at the outcome, at first unable to believe their eyes. But order is restored at the awards ceremony as the worth of each hero is properly acknowledged. Diomedes may keep the first-place prize, while Eumelus, “the best man in last place” (536), is initially offered the second prize but then, when Antilochus objects, receives a special prize of his own. Menelaus calls for a penalty against Antilochus, and the younger man, accepting the blame, is willing to give up his coveted prize; Menelaus graciously lets him keep the second-place mare, but the point has clearly been made and Menelaus’ rightful place in the hierarchy confirmed. The crash of Eumelus and the reckless driving of Antilochus make the episode dramatic, and the richness of the detail, as the scholar Demetrius of Phaleron pointed out, lends it vividness or *enargeia* (*On Style* 210), yet the episode creates suspense precisely by initially frustrating but later fulfilling expectations. Thus in this narrative we have suspense but not a sense of the indeterminacy of events.

My second example—now representing the present on its own terms—is Thucydides’ exciting story of Athenian naval successes (book 2), in which the reader is completely unprepared for the turn of events. The historian mentions that the Ambraciots asked for Spartan help against the Acarnanians (80); he notes in passing that the Athenian admiral Phormio could not help the opposing side because he had to protect Naupactus (81); and only after narrating events on land does he add that the ships on the Spartan side did not reach Acarnania because they were forced to fight a sea battle against the Athenians, explaining:

Phormio was watching them as they sailed out of the gulf, wanting to attack in the open sea, whereas the Corinthians and their allies were not sailing toward Acarnania with expectations of a sea battle but were equipped more as transports and did not believe that the Athenians, with their twenty ships against forty-seven, would dare to fight a sea battle. (83)¹¹

When Phormio’s ships advanced, the Corinthians made a circle with prows facing outward, a defensive and presumably impregnable formation. Thucydides explains that “the Athenians, by contrast, arranged in single file, sailed around them in a circle and kept

drawing them closer together, always almost touching them as they sailed and making them think they would attack immediately” (84). The reader was not prepared for the battle before it arose and is not now prepared for the strategy or its outcome. Only after describing how the Corinthian circle kept becoming smaller does the narrator turn to Phormio and his plans.

He expected that the enemy would not stay in formation, like infantry on land, but the ships would bump into each other and the boats would create confusion, and that, if the wind blew out of the gulf (which was what he was waiting for as he sailed around and which usually happens at dawn), they would not stay still for any length of time. (84)

If Thucydides had begun by explaining Phormio’s strategy, he would have established expectations against which readers could measure events; as it is, his strategy is explained only as it takes effect, and the reader, like the participants, is surprised at this clever victory by a much inferior fleet. The events that follow are more transparent to the reader since the narrator describes preparations on both sides and reports the speeches and strategies of both generals, yet the fact that the battle unfolds in accordance with the Peloponnesian counterstrategy (87–90) only serves to heighten the reader’s surprise when an Athenian ship uses a clever ruse to sink its pursuer, suddenly turning defeat into victory (91–92). Both the accounts of the first battle and the sequel to the second create a sense of indeterminacy because the reader is no more prepared for the outcome than the participants.

Present shock thus involves two interrelated developments. On the one hand, a shift in values causes the authority of the past to be replaced with that of the present; on the other hand, new techniques portray events as unfolding in the present rather than already determined by narrative expectations. Although a shift from past to present can be seen to begin as early as the seventh century with the personal lyrics of Archilochus, only in the late fifth century do narratives fully confront the reader with the indeterminacy and “presentness” of human experience. Rejecting the prestige of the past and embracing the uncertainties of the present also involve an important shift in values. Rather than draw on venerated principles and precepts, individuals must strategize and improvise; they have greater authority in their deliberations but also greater dependence on their circumstances. A narrative interest in present experience, in other words, brings with it a revised understanding of human responsibilities and human agency.

This is not the first study of time in Greek literature. Much good

work has been done on the notion of time in individual literary genres: for example, Jacqueline de Romilly in *Time in Greek Tragedy* compares the concept of time in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, arguing that it became progressively more sophisticated, psychological, and modern; by contrast, Virginia Hunter explores the notions of change and causation in *Past and Process in Herodotus and Thucydides*, arguing that the more traditional or primitive interest in pattern and process has advantages over the “modern” model of mechanical causation. Many scholars have studied the narrower genre of literary and philosophical reflections on human progress: Ludwig Edelstein’s *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity* is the most comprehensive study, tracing the development and elaboration of the concept from Xenophanes to Seneca, while Christian Meier’s “An Ancient Equivalent of the Concept of Progress” contrasts the modern view of society as “temporalized” and subject to change with the fifth century’s interest in human capacities and its static view of society. More wide-ranging is Hermann Fraenkel’s essay “Die Zeitauffassung in der frühgriechischen Literatur,” positing that early Greek poetry articulated temporal concepts and objectified time only gradually. Finally, a collection of essays on fifth-century Athens, Boedeker and Raafaub’s *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts*, includes three essays that variously connect this period’s general interest in the present with the change from oligarchy to democracy (Csapo and Miller, “Democracy, Empire, and Art”), with the emergence of the new genre of historiography (Boedeker, “Presenting the Past”), and—somewhat impressionistically—with “the intense and risky character of Athenian politics”¹² (Hölscher, “Images and Political Identity”). My own approach is interdisciplinary: rather than follow one genre through time or compare an ancient genre with its modern equivalent, I consider similar developments across various genres within the same time period. My approach is also localized: rather than survey the entire history of a genre or generalize about fifth-century Athens as a whole, I focus on concepts and practices that emerged in a short and very fertile period.

My approach is thus largely synchronic, though not in the manner of much recent scholarship. With regard to the latter, a general distrust of grand narratives has induced scholars to abandon the developmental schemes of Fraenkel, Edelstein, and de Romilly, as well as their respective accounts of how primitive concepts are gradually refined to more closely approximate their modern counterparts. A positive aspect of this development is New Historicism’s attention to cultural values and practices, but this brings with it the paradox of a scholarship on time that ignores diachronic change. Vernant, for

example, describes the verbal debates and conflicts of fifth-century drama as an extension of the new legal practices of democratic Athens, while Loraux describes the timeless ideals enshrined in fourth-century funeral orations as part of the city's larger project of redefining itself and its past. In practice, these studies are concerned not with changing institutions or changing accounts of time but, rather, with the place of such accounts in a given cultural system. In theory, both draw on a Foucauldian view of culture as stable and all-controlling; as Eric Csapo and Margaret Miller observe, "the problem with reifying the polis as a kind of unmoved mover is that it effaces human agency, which is precisely why we lose sight of the active ingredient of diachronic change."¹³ Csapo and Miller proceed to tweak the Foucauldian model. Following Pierre Vidal-Naquet's distinction between "divine" and "human" time in Greek thought, they distinguish "aristocratic" from "democratic" time, arguing for an active rivalry between the two in fifth-century Athens followed by an accommodation or Hegelian synthesis in the fourth century. Thus they reify the aristocratic and democratic as unchanging sets of cultural interests and values. Although this binary model is popular in current scholarship on Greek culture, it nevertheless continues to efface human agency and active change, transferring the problematic notion of resistance in Foucault's monadic scheme to an equally problematic notion of essential dualism.

How then do we address the issue of change without falling back on developmental grand narratives? On a theoretical level, this is a central question in literary criticism today that is fueling attempts to recover identity and agency (as in Moya and Hames-García's *Reclaiming Identity*) along with a place for ethics (as contested in Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz's *The Turn to Ethics*), but it is too soon to know what new paradigm will emerge. For example, a sophisticated new approach, the "postpositivist realism" of Satya Mohanty, has encouraged attempts to theorize a middle course between essentialism and constructivism; these efforts, however, deal with traumatic individual change, such as a gay man's "coming out," presumably concentrating on discrete moments of crisis as these are simpler to theorize than broader and more gradual forms of change.¹⁴ On a practical level, the present impasse has prompted a turn to local "micronarratives" describing people on the margins or at the interstices of history, where resistance, identity, or agency is assumed even if it cannot easily be rationalized. My own project is likewise practical and descriptive, mapping changes at a turning point between the fifth and fourth centuries while disavowing recourse to an underlying or overarching mechanism to explain such change; yet at

the same time, my observation of parallel developments in philosophy, drama, historiography, anthropology, and civic institutions reminds us both that cultural and intellectual changes intersect and overlap, thus reinforcing or stimulating one another, and that such a complex and fluid situation does not easily admit a linear explanation.

In general, then, my observations of relatively short-term change (diachrony) make it hard for me to draw on the prevailing (synchronic) model of New Historicism, while I have no interest in resurrecting the longterm diachrony of the old approach. In particular, I explore an intriguing convergence among literary and intellectual spheres without treating this as the mere symptom or result of a causally prior development (as we might, for example, by tracing changes back to a decline in Athenian power, the advance of literacy, or the evolution of literary genres);¹⁵ consequently, I shall consider the social and political contexts of the new endeavors that comprise “present shock” and point to accompanying developments—both obvious (setbacks to Athenian power and hegemony) and less so (the institutional interests of medical practitioners)—without proposing a “master” cause. Rather, I hope to convince my readers that such writers as Antiphon and Thucydides, in representing the indeterminacy of experience, contribute to a significant change in ancient Greek culture.

To that end, this book explores how several different genres—philosophy, drama, historiography, and anthropology—devote greater attention to present experience and, in their own respective ways, confront its indeterminacy. Chapter 1 sets the stage by describing how time was used in the fifth century to organize events of the past (especially in historiography) as well as the religious and financial business of the city (especially in the Athenian calendars). It is noteworthy that the organization of time changed significantly in the course of the fifth century, moving from an emphasis on the authority of the past to an interest in the present needs of the city. The most radical experiments were in the late fifth century: Thucydides invented a “present epoch” that completely divorced the temporal frame of historiography from the authority of civic institutions, while the Athenian council adopted a solar calendar that completely divorced the city’s administrative framework from the religious authority of the lunar months. In both cases, rational and intellectually progressive schemes gave unprecedented autonomy to the needs of the historian or public official.

I then turn in [chapter 2](#) to representations of human experience,

considering changing philosophical notions of time. Whereas earlier thinkers were especially concerned with somehow reconciling phenomenal change with eternal being, those in the second half of the fifth century developed a humanistic interest in temporal experience. This general interest in the time-dependency of knowledge takes a radical turn in the late fifth century with the thinking of Antiphon, who apparently refused to abstract a metaphysical time from human experience but turned instead to narrative as the best way to understand temporality on its own terms. Unfortunately, we possess only fragments of Antiphon's intriguing project.

The remaining chapters look at complete (or nearly complete) narratives from various genres. [Chapter 3](#) looks at Euripidean drama, observing how the events of the play are largely divorced from past and future in a way they are not in Aeschylus or Sophocles. This attention to the present as the zone of action is reinforced by the familiar, "melodramatic" features of the plot (the busy, accidental, and indecisive course of events), as well as other aspects of the characters' actions and deliberations (obstacles, suspense, freedom, and uncertainty). A formal result is that characters onstage find themselves with a heightened autonomy—but at the same time greater uncertainty. From a more ideological perspective, civic and imperial values lose their force, endowing protagonists with unprecedented freedom but leaving them with the heavy burden of finding new values.

[Chapter 4](#) examines how Thucydides narrates events in his *History*. His programmatic claims are as striking and original as his chronological innovation: he promises to describe not the events of the past but those of the present. This project of "writing present history" entails formal or narratological innovations, one of which is to isolate a moment (a turning point in battle or a deliberation in the assembly) as a crucial point in the course of the story, at the same time making it especially difficult for the reader to anticipate the outcome. This formal project has important ideological implications since, as the historian observes, Athenians, both individually and collectively, are ideally suited to acting and deliberating in these present moments. Yet by showing that these decisive or deliberative moments have competing ideological goals, Thucydides divorces the heightened autonomy of the "civic present" from any ideological ends it may serve.

Finally, [chapter 5](#) concentrates on narratives of human progress. Accounts of the development of human culture were popular in the fifth century, but only late in the century, in *Ancient Medicine*, is such

a narrative fully imbedded in time. The author of this Hippocratic treatise describes incremental developments as both uncertain and nonteleological. In doing so, he, like Antiphon, comes closest to articulating a view of human action and deliberation that is necessarily empirical. The ideological implications are negative in that there is no inherent value or authority in human culture and its institutions. Nevertheless they are also positive insofar as *Ancient Medicine* participates in a larger practice of empirical therapy. Laborious improvements in diet and medicine depend not only on careful attention to attendant circumstances but also on knowledge of past successes and failures.

Despite its interdisciplinary breadth, this study focuses on a relatively brief period in Greek cultural history and a relatively limited set of narrative strategies. The epilogue warns against the pitfalls of a more encyclopedic approach, offering instead two snippets of a larger picture by sketching some implications of present shock in the late fifth century and some fragments of its legacy in the fourth. Furthermore, I like to think that the chapters herein will provoke a closer examination of the ethical aspects of ancient narrative—but then, who knows what the future may hold?

CHAPTER 1

Civic Time

TIME IS IN many ways a human construct. Poststructuralist criticism has taught us to beware that such categories as male and female, self and other, which might seem fundamental or essential, are actually constructed by particular societies and their institutions. Our precise and pervasive division of the day into hours, minutes, and seconds, for example, has less to do with the nature of time itself than with the need that arose during the Industrial Revolution to organize and control large numbers of workers on various shifts.¹ Time is also in some ways essential. As biological creatures, we are constantly aging and moving toward death; as social creatures, we are constantly adapting to and altering our changing environment. The phases of the moon, the seasons of the year, and the movements of the sun by day and stars by night, for example, represent continual changes in the environment to which humans adapt, yet different societies attach different meanings to these same phenomena. For instance, a traditional, agricultural society will organize its cultural life more closely around the seasons and activities governed by the seasons, such as planting and harvesting, attaching its own meanings to particular times of the day or year. By contrast, an industrial society will organize its cultural life and assign meanings less around such natural phenomena than around an employment schedule and the division of time into week and weekend, work year and summer or winter vacations.

This chapter has two aims. First, by describing changes in the city's organization of time, it will provide a general context for the chapters that follow. New ways of dividing the day and the year and new ways of situating events of the past show Athens in the late fifth century reconstructing its notion of time, giving it new and often specifically democratic meanings. In view of this, the attempts of Euripides and his contemporaries to express a new understanding of time and the present are part of a development that was widespread in Greece, particularly in Athens. These reconstructions of civic time became more daring toward the end of the century. Second, important aspects of these new schemes for measuring time anticipate specific features of the narratives I shall discuss in later chapters. They exhibit

a desire for completeness, a focus less on singular, canonical points than on a continuum often filled with mundane events. The new schemes also suggest a kind of immediacy, viewing events less within a natural or cosmic framework than within a human and collective one—and in some cases dispensing with any larger framework altogether. The fifth-century historian Thucydides is original in both these areas. In this chapter, we shall see how he devises a new chronology independent of larger schemes; in [chapter 4](#), we shall see how his narrative conveys the uncertainties of the immediate present. I shall begin with the smallest units that measure the time of day, turning next to the larger units of the calendar that measure the year and finally to the years, generations, and eras by which historiography measures the past.

DIVIDING THE DAY

In measuring the time of day, the ancient Greeks seem to us primitive and conservative. We take for granted the division of the day into hours and minutes; in daily life we measure out seconds on our microwaves, while scientists and engineers operate in a world where time ticks by in nanoseconds. In the classical period, despite an increasingly sophisticated understanding of time, the Greeks used rather crude methods to indicate the time of day. Throughout the fifth century and well into the Hellenistic era, they did not divide the day into hours but instead referred to natural phenomena. The time of day was generally given by the sun's course across the sky. Homer's Achilles indicates that the hero's death may come at any time by saying, "it may be at dawn or afternoon or midday when someone takes my life in battle" (*Iliad* 21.111–12), and when Herodotus describes the daily changes of temperature in India, he specifies, "at dawn... the middle of the day... as afternoon progresses... even later... at sunset" (3.104; cf. 4.181).

As the sun provided only three canonical points of sunrise, noon, and sunset, daily routine supplied intermediate stages: the filling of the market (in early morning), the emptying of the market (in late morning), the worker's meal (around midday), and the unyoking of oxen (in the afternoon). In Homer, Odysseus must wait until the time "when a man rises from the market for his dinner, after judging many disputes" (*Odyssey* 12.439–40; cf. *Iliad* 11.86) for Charybdis to regurgitate his mast, and heroes fought over the body of Kebriones until the time "when the sun turned toward the unyoking of oxen" (*Iliad* 16.779; cf. *Odyssey* 9.58). For Herodotus, indications of the time of day include "when the market is full" (4.181), "until the market

empties” (3.104), and “around when the lamps are lit” (7.215), and a character in Aristophanes specifies the time of day as “a little bit after midday,” at which his interlocutor asks, “When the oxen are released, or later?” (*Birds* 1499–1500).²

Reliance on the sun and daily routines for telling time continued from Homer until the end of the fifth century, when the classical period introduced a single innovation, the use of a person’s shadow to approximate time in the afternoon. In Aristophanes, characters arranged to take their evening meal when the length of their shadow was seven feet (fr. 675) or ten feet (*Ecclesiazusae* 652), and in a comic routine in New Comedy, a character invited to dinner unexpectedly arrived around dawn because he measured his shadow in the morning (Athenaeus 1.8 = Eubulus fr. 117 Kassel-Austin) or by moonlight (Athenaeus 6.243 = Menander fr. 304) instead of in the afternoon.³ By modern standards, then, the measurement of daytime was exceedingly simple, relying only on the movement of the sun and the routines of the day, and even in cosmopolitan Athens, invitations to dinner merely specified the length of a person’s shadow. Apparently, neither the interests of the polis nor the routines of its inhabitants required any more accurate partitioning of the day. In other aspects of measuring and organizing time, however, late fifth-century Athens was the site of some intriguing innovations.

Buckets of Time

Sometime before 425, an accurate instrument for measuring time was first introduced in the Athenian law courts. This device, the *klepsydra*, or “water timer,” was used in private cases to time the speeches of the plaintiff and defendant. Characters in Aristophanes refer to the *klepsydra* as an essential piece of court equipment (*Acharnians* 693; *Wasps* 93, 857–58); orators in the fourth century give instructions concerning stopping and starting the water (e.g., Isocrates 18.51; Demosthenes 18.139; Aeschines 3.197);⁴ and Aristotle explains that different amounts of water, measured by the *chous* (pl. *choes*), or “bucket,” were allowed in different cases. For example, in a suit for more than five thousand drachmas, plaintiff and defendant were each allowed ten choes of water for the first speech and three choes of water for the second (*Athenian Constitution* 67).

The device worked much like a modern egg timer, using a given quantity of water to measure out a specific amount of time. The one example found in excavation held two choes of water that emptied in about six minutes.⁵ The *klepsydra* was not a clock. A clock measures

time by reference to standard units, such as minutes or seconds; for example, in the mid-third century Ctesibius invented a complicated outflow water clock that marked out the seasonal hours,⁶ and much earlier the Babylonians had apparently invented inflow water clocks to measure the intervals between astronomical events.⁷ The Athenian water timer, by contrast, simply dispensed a given volume of water. Speeches were allotted the time it took for two to ten choes of water to empty, and there is no reason to assume that vessels of various sizes were not used. Because of water pressure, one six-chous vessel would empty more quickly than three two-chous vessels, and moreover, because of inevitable differences in the outflow tubes, one two-chous vessel would empty at a different rate from another. As a result, the klepsydra did not measure units of time but simply ensured that the speakers on both sides of a case had the same amount of time to speak.

Nevertheless the device was an important conceptual advance. Time was precisely allotted as it had not been before, in this case using liquid measures already established by the city as legal units of exchange.⁸ The innovation was closely related to certain changes in the polis. The reforms of Ephialtes earlier in the century had placed much greater demands on the courts, allowing all cases to be heard by a jury in the Heliaia, rather than by an archon.⁹ As it became increasingly apparent that jury trials had to be streamlined, the water timer was introduced both to limit the length of speeches and to ensure the fair and equal apportionment of speaking time. Although this novel instrument played an important part in the democratization of justice, it was not otherwise used to measure or regulate time.¹⁰

Democratic Time

One reason for the limited use of the klepsydra might be the conservative nature of Greek society: despite the intellectual ferment of fifth-century Athens, indications of the time of day were still tied to the movement of the sun and the rhythms of agricultural life. Another reason might be the relative weakness of civic and social institutions: the democratic courts found a new way to manage the speaking time of plaintiffs and defendants, but the polis did not otherwise regulate daily time (contrast the close regulation of nine-to-five days, sixty-minute lunch hours, and swing shifts in the modern workplace). Such explanations are reasonable but perhaps underestimate the constructive changes involved. With the introduction of the klepsydra, for example, daily time, once simply reflected in natural phenomena, was now more firmly regulated by the polis in choes. These units had

no relation to natural time; they were purely artificial creations and purely democratic in conception. This democratic management of time had an important precedent, however, in the similarly democratic reorganization of the calendar, which created prytanies as artificial administrative periods to replace the familiar and natural months (as discussed later in this chapter).

Two later developments extended the city's daily management of time. At some point in the second half of the century, presumably after the introduction of the klepsydra, the entire day was divided into *amphoras* (or "barrels") of time. Whereas in private cases a certain number of choes were allotted to the speeches on either side, in public cases the entire proceedings constituted a "measured-through day." Although the details are uncertain, clearly different stages of the trial were each allotted a certain number of amphoras of water.¹¹ Starting from eleven amphoras (an approximation for the shortest day of the year), these were apparently distributed among the stages of a public case to ensure that each stage had enough time and that the trial would finish before the day ended. The polis, in other words, replaced the natural day from sunrise to sunset with a schematic, standardized forensic day that would not vary from winter to summer. The new divisions of the day correlated not with the course of the sun or social routines but simply with the number of amphoras emptied.

One hundred years later, this partitioning of the day into choes and amphoras was taken a step further. At the end of the fourth century, a large container that could hold more than ten hours' worth of water was built in the agora. Although we do not know exactly what purpose this device served, we do know that it was not a clock able to measure out hours or other standard units of time, since the rate of flow would have varied as it emptied.¹² It was most likely a monumental timer that established a fixed but arbitrary maximum length for meetings or trials, just as smaller timers established fixed but arbitrary maximum lengths for the speeches or stages of a trial.

While it is obvious from a modern perspective what these innovations did not do (i.e., divide the day into a sequence of fixed and uniform minutes and hours), more interesting is what they did do: they created what we might call democratic, rather than capital, time. Modern units of time measure a worker's labor in hours and minutes, promoting the equation of time with money or capital. By contrast, Athenian time was apportioned by water among tribes and disputing parties. Rather than creating fixed units (hours and minutes) that could be treated as commodities of value, the courts created relative

units (choes and amphoras) that could be allotted democratically.

By the third century, a more precise division of the day into twelve “seasonal hours” (so called because each hour of daylight in winter was substantially shorter than those in summer) witnessed a proliferation of sundials.¹³ The movement of the sun across the sky, so important in the earliest designations of the time of day, remained the central frame of reference. The difference was that this path from sunrise to sunset was now precisely divided into twelve parts by dividing into twelve the corresponding path traced across the face of a sundial by the sun’s shadow.¹⁴ This technical innovation had lasting effects: it introduced the seasonal hours that became the standard measure across the Hellenistic world and later the Roman Empire. Prior to this, the only major innovation had been the introduction of the choes and amphoras in Athenian law courts in the late fifth century. Although the klepsydra had little application outside the law courts¹⁵ and was strictly administrative in function, it involved an important conceptual change. In contrast to the sundial, which divided the natural interval from sunrise to noon to sunset, the Athenian water timer introduced a scheme entirely independent of the sun’s path, responding to the immediate needs of the democratic trial process and invoking no outside frame of reference. I turn now to analogous but more complex changes in the organization of the calendar.

PARTITIONING THE YEAR

As in most agricultural societies, the activities of cultural life in ancient Greece were largely governed by the seasonal, or tropical, year. Farmers need to determine the best time to plough, to sow and reap various crops, to prune vines, and so on. Since Hesiod, the Greeks used the solstices, or “turnings of the sun” (ἡλίου τροπαί), and the risings and settings of various stars as their guides. In *Works and Days*, the poet advises:

When the Pleiades, daughters of Atlas, are rising
begin the harvest, begin plowing when they are setting;
they are hidden for forty days and forty nights,
and first appear again as the year revolves
when the blade is being sharpened. (383–87)

The poet goes on to explain that when Arcturus rises at dusk it is time to prune the vines (565–70), when it rises at dawn it is time to harvest the grapes (609–11), and when Orion rises it is time to winnow the

This type of calendar was neither complete nor completely accurate. It was incomplete in the sense that it afforded only a few canonical points; whereas every day in our year has a unique designation by month and day, very few days in Hesiod's year were marked at all. Occasionally Hesiod measured the intervals between canonical points by counting days, noting, for example, that the Pleiades first rise (before dawn) forty days after they can no longer be seen after dusk (383–87, just quoted) and that Arcturus last rises (after dusk) sixty days after the winter solstice (564–67). Only once does Hesiod count days to fill in these intervals, noting, for example, that it is safe to sail for fifty days after the summer solstice (663–65); thus there is no continuum based on canonical days (e.g., the first day following the setting of the Pleiades, the second day following it, and so on).¹⁶ Moreover, his calendar was subject to considerable inaccuracy since in different years spring or winter might arrive at an earlier or later point in the tropical year. Only in a few cases did Hesiod address this problem by watching for the voice of the crane (448–49) or for fig leaves as large as a crow's footprint (679–80)—seasonal markers independent of the movement of the stars. These represented modest improvements to a seasonal calendar that was otherwise rudimentary and incomplete.

Whereas the farmer's calendar followed the tropical movement of the sun, the social and religious calendar largely followed the course of the moon. In each city the year consisted of twelve or thirteen lunar months, the names of which varied from city to city, as did the time at which the year began. As far as we can tell, however, all Greek cities used months of twenty-nine or thirty days that began with the *noumenia*, or first appearance and setting of the waxing moon.¹⁷ These lunar calendars determined the monthly sacrifices to the gods (Athena's birthday on the third of each month and Apollo's on the seventh);¹⁸ annual festivals, such as the Anthesteria (on 11–13 Anthesterion) and the City Dionysia (around 10–16 Elaphebolion);¹⁹ and Panhellenic festivals, such as the Eleusinian Mysteries. They also determined periods of truce, such as the holy month of Carneius. The names for the first day of the month (νομήνια, or “new moon”) and for days in the first and third “decades” of each month (the first ten days ἰσταμένους, or “waxing”; the last ten Φθίνοντος, or “waning”) reflected the lunar basis of these calendars. Hesiod's advice to weave on the twelfth of the month and bring home a wife on the fourth (*Works and Days* 779, 800) reflected the importance attached to individual days. Although the farmer's solar calendar and the priest's lunar calendar were equally important, nevertheless Greek cities

regulated only the latter. In Athens, for example, the archon was charged with administering and revising the city's religious (lunar) calendar.

The Democratic Year

Sometime before the mid-fifth century, most likely as part of the reforms introduced by Cleisthenes at the end of the sixth century, the council, or boule, adopted a new administrative calendar that differed from that of the archon. The boule took the lunar year that the archon used to schedule the city's religious observances and divided this year not into twelve or thirteen months but into ten equal prytanies. The council consisted of five hundred men, fifty from each tribe, and the presidency of the council or prytany rotated from one tribe to the next; as a result, the archon's year was divided by the council into ten equal periods, also called prytanies (Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 43–44). These administrative units of time, like the choes of time measured in the courts, were purely artificial creations, established to divide the year evenly and democratically among the ten tribes. The prytanies, of course, were modeled on the archon's months, and Cleisthenes' reforms, however bold, were revisionist, rather than revolutionary, in spirit: the four natural (ancestral) tribes and the twelve or thirteen natural (lunar) months were replaced by ten schematic and democratic tribes and prytanies. The boule's calendar was not only more democratic but also more efficient. Instead of scheduling meetings and calculating accounts by years that sometimes had twelve months and sometimes thirteen and in which individual months were subject to adjustment by the archon, the council could work with ten equal divisions of the year.²⁰ Yet this efficiency had its limits. Although civic needs divided the year into ten parts, the variable lunar year still determined its overall length. As the archon's year varied in length between twelve and thirteen months, the council's year also varied, and consequently its prytanies fluctuated from thirty-five or thirty-six days to thirty-eight or thirty-nine.

The Astronomers' Year

The boule's democratic version of the year was relatively simple, dividing the lunar year into ten equal but arbitrary parts. By the late fifth century, the Greeks more thoroughly revised their other year, the solar, or tropical, year of agriculture. Farmers and astronomers, poets and city managers, all had different uses for this revision.

Traditionally, the month followed the phases of the moon, beginning with the observation of the first visible crescent, while the year followed the seasons. The archon's calendar in Athens kept months in phase with the moon by the approximate alternation of "full" and "hollow" months of thirty and twenty-nine days and kept the year in phase with the seasons by the approximate alternation of "ordinary" and "intercalary" years of twelve and thirteen months.²¹ This relatively simple scheme controlled by observation was enough to administer monthly sacrifices to the Olympian gods and annual seasonal festivals. By the late fifth century, astronomers were able to offer a much more precise alternative. Rather than beginning the month at a sunset governed by observation, they began it at conjunction—namely, when (as extrapolated from observations) the path of the moon crossed that of the sun (the ecliptic). This allowed them to define the astronomical, or "synodic," month as a precise period from one conjunction to the next. Thucydides takes evident pride in knowing the difference between the new moon of the archon's calendar and the new moon of conjunction, when he mentions an eclipse in 431: "that same summer there was an eclipse of the sun in the afternoon on the noumenia according to the moon [i.e., not on the noumenia according to the archon's calendar]—which seems to be the only time it is possible" (2.28). Therefore, although the astronomers' month follows the same phases of the moon as the archon's month, it would nevertheless usually begin two or three days earlier.²²

The traditional year of the archon and that of the farmer were both approximate but in different ways. Since the archon's lunar year consisted sometimes of twelve months, sometimes of thirteen, it had no fixed beginning or end. In Athens, the year began with 1 Hekatombaion, but this date had a fixed relation neither to midsummer nor to the summer solstice.²³ The farmer's year, in turn, was solar or seasonal but not especially precise, since it involved loosely defined seasons; isolated points, such as the setting of the Pleiades; and loosely defined days, such as midsummer and midwinter. By the late fifth century, a more accurate determination of solstices and equinoxes and a fuller understanding of these as cardinal points in the sun's path along the ecliptic allowed astronomers to define the solar, or "tropical," year as a precise period from one summer solstice (τροπῆ) to the next.

These developments in astronomy culminated in the famous nineteen-year cycle of Meton. In 432, he published an elaborate lunisolar scheme that began and ended with the summer solstice.²⁴ By including exactly seven intercalary years in each nineteen-year cycle

and by including exactly 110 hollow months, the astronomer was able to construct a standard calendar that stayed remarkably close to the actual astronomical cycles of both sun and moon. If we divide the 6,940 days in each cycle by the nineteen years and 235 months in the cycle, we find that Meton calculated the mean tropical year at 365.263 days and the mean synodic month at 29.532 days; this correlates closely with the modern figures of 365.242 and 29.531, respectively. Meton may have learned of the nineteen-year cycles used by the Babylonians,²⁵ and he purportedly learned the precise observation of solstices from a metic, Phaeinos (Theophrastus *On Signs* 1.4). Yet despite its greater accuracy, the abstract, astronomical scheme of Meton did not coincide with the periods familiar to priest and farmer, and no Greek city, to our knowledge, ever adopted Meton's cycle as its civic calendar.²⁶

The astronomers' innovations were felt indirectly. As we have seen, Hesiod's almanac was quite incomplete, relying on a few canonical points, such as the summer solstice, winter solstice, the rising and setting of the Pleiades, and the rising of Arcturus and Orion; and Hesiod rarely fills in this scheme by counting days from any one of them. The efforts of three figures in the late fifth century did, however, produce a much more complete and accurate calendar. For instance, Democritus added more astronomical events, describing the weather associated with each: stormy weather at the evening setting of Lyra and thunder and lightning at the rising of Aquila.²⁷ He also recorded more detailed intervals, noting, for example, that "the west wind begins to blow forty-three days after the [winter] solstice."²⁸ Meton presumably did likewise (as discussed shortly), but while few of his datings survive,²⁹ Euctemon provides us with a comprehensive almanac, including both equinoxes and solstices, adding the risings and settings of many additional stars, and describing the weather associated with many of these. For example, he marks the autumn equinox and notes that on this day the weather changes; then two days later the Haedi rise in the evening and it is stormy; two days later still the Pleiades appear in the evening and the weather changes; and finally, again two days later, Corona rises and it is stormy.³⁰ The entire tropical year is thus fully and precisely mapped out.

We do not know whether Euctemon simply published comprehensive lists of the intervals between astronomical phenomena or created something akin to the later stone calendars that used pegs to situate the present day in relation to these phenomena.³¹ In either case, Euctemon's almanac was a remarkable improvement over that of Hesiod, and it gave rise to a great proliferation of almanacs written both in prose (Geminus app.; Columella *De re rustica* 1 pref. 32) and in

poetry (Aratus 752–60). This improvement in turn depended not just on careful observation of rising and setting stars but on the accurate astronomical determination of solstices and equinoxes and of the length of the solar year.³² There is therefore a close connection between Euctemon's mapping of the year and Meton's astronomical research. For this reason, a scholiast names Meton rather than Euctemon in connection with this proliferation of almanacs: "astronomers after [Meton] set up tables in the cities concerning the nineteen-year cycles of the sun, numbering out for each year that the winter will be like this, the summer like this, the autumn like this, the winds like these, and many other things to benefit human livelihood."³³

The tropical, or seasonal, year, originally a vague period marked by two or four cardinal points, thus became a continuum in which every day had its place. It began on a fixed day, the summer solstice, and from there mapped each day against the gradual (apparent) motion of the fixed stars.³⁴ By the fourth century, if not sooner, this detailed continuum was registered by moving a peg from one hole in a stone table to the next. This novel system was adopted so easily because it filled in the grid familiar from Hesiod's time; registered not just the risings and settings of stars but seasonal markers, such as the beginning of spring and the middle of winter;³⁵ and detailed the changes in wind and weather so important to the farmer. Both advances in astronomy and the spread of literacy must have played a part in the rapid adoption of this revised seasonal calendar. In the course of the fourth century, Callippus and Eudoxus continued to fill in this almanac with additional observations of rising and setting stars. The most radical change, however, took place in the late fifth century, when the seasonal year was first conceived as a complete, continuous, and self-contained scheme.

The Council's Year

When the Athenian civic calendar was democratized, presumably at the end of the sixth century, by dividing the archon's year into ten prytanies, the council did not create entirely new units of time as the law courts did in creating choes and amphoras of time for speakers. Instead it divided the existing year of twelve or thirteen months into ten equal parts. Those impressed by Meton's demonstration that the year could be measured much more accurately might well have been dissatisfied both with the variable length of the archon's year and with the inherent imprecision of lunar months based on observing the new crescent.

It was presumably for these reasons that the council in the late fifth century adopted a new calendar based on the tropical year.³⁶ This calendar began and ended at a different time (most likely the summer solstice) from that of the archon, was probably introduced around 430, and was abandoned shortly before the end of the century.³⁷ Like the council's earlier calendar, this one was divided into ten equal prytanies; but unlike its predecessor, it was based not on the variable lunar year of roughly 354 or 384 days but on a precise tropical year of slightly more than 365 days. As long as the council's calendar was based on that of the archon, the length of prytanies would vary; in one year, meetings would be scheduled, payments made, and interest calculated according to prytanies of thirty-five and thirty-six days, while in another year the council would have to deal with prytanies of thirty-eight and thirty-nine days. The new solar calendar eliminated these inconsistencies. Beginning with a fixed astronomical date, it ran for the same period every year. Every year consisted of 365 or 366 days, and every prytany contained thirty-six or thirty-seven days. The democratic distribution of duties among the tribes was thus more regular than before. More important, the reckoning of the city's finances was absolutely consistent from one year to the next. It may be that the council, unlike the archon, was interested in scientific developments and wanted the city's administrative calendar to be up-to-date and scientifically correct; more important are the practical uses of a consistent calendar. In 432, as Athens prepared for war and as the boule prepared for exceptional levies and expenditures, the advantages of a more regular calendar would have been especially evident.

Although it is perhaps not surprising that an intellectual such as Thucydides was aware of the astronomers' new and more accurate month, it is surprising that the council replaced the archon's traditional lunar calendar with the scientists' solar one. All members of the demos were familiar with the farmer's tropical year, and many may have been familiar with the new, more complete almanacs, but what would induce them to adopt a tropical, or solar, scheme for the city's administration? This would involve beginning the financial year not when the new moon appeared at 1 Hekatombaion but at an astronomically determined summer solstice, a date that had no place on the archon's calendar. Doubts and reservations may have been assuaged when Meton in 433/2 placed a heliotrope at a prominent location in Athens: "in the archonship of Apseudes preceding that of Pythodorus, he placed a *ἡλιότροπιον* in the present assembly by the wall on the Pnyx."³⁸ A heliotrope was a solstice marker that indicated the turnings of the sun (*ἡλίου τροπαί*).³⁹ It consisted of a

hemispherical bowl, or polos, that received a shadow from an upright rod, or gnomon; the bowl mirrored the celestial sphere, and the paths followed by the sun on different days of the year were projected by the tip of the rod onto corresponding arcs in the bowl. A heliotrope would thus have three canonical arcs: one for the summer solstice, one for the winter solstice, and one between them for both equinoxes.

In determining the solstice, a heliotrope is far more convenient than the traditional method of tracking the sun's shadow. Tracking the midday shadow requires measuring its length each day when it is shortest (at high noon), comparing the shortest length from one day to the next, and then determining which day has the shortest of all short (noon) shadows. This day is the summer solstice, and the day with the longest of all short (noon) shadows is the winter solstice. A heliotrope, by contrast, indicates the summer solstice when the tip of the gnomon's shadow touches the inner arc, and it can be observed touching this arc at any time of the day; likewise the shadow touches the outer arc throughout the day on the winter solstice. Using Meton's heliotrope, members of the assembly were able for the first time to observe the solstices and equinoxes easily and precisely. I suspect that by commissioning this instrument, the polis demonstrated that the council's year had a starting point as clearly recognizable as the new crescent, or noumenia, that marked the beginning of Hekatombaion and the archon's year. Only by such clear and public persuasion might a solar year hope to challenge the authority of the lunar calendar.

After Dionysius made himself tyrant of Syracuse at the end of the fifth century, he placed a heliotrope by the assembly in apparent emulation of Athens and Meton.⁴⁰ In seizing power by force, the tyrant rejected the traditional authority of the city's democratic institutions, though he maintained the outward form of those institutions; in his rise to power, he depended not on the oligarchic faction but on the demos.⁴¹ This brilliant politician and general placed his heliotrope by the assembly with a purpose: no doubt he wanted to suggest that under his leadership Syracuse would attain the greatness of Athens. Did he also redesign the Syracusan calendar? Did this charismatic tyrant somehow use the heliotrope's clear division of the solar year to proclaim independence from traditional Corinthian institutions and to show how Syracuse could reinvent itself?

Calendar Shock

During the late fifth century, the religious and administrative years were in greater conflict than ever before. The lunar year had been

institutionalized in the archon's calendar governing public festivals and sacrifices, while the seasonal year was now institutionalized in the council's calendar governing city administration and finances. Any expectable confusion from this situation would be minimized if the two calendars at least began and ended at the same time. We know, for example, that in the fourth century, meetings of the assembly were convened according to the council's calendar, four times each prytany (Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 43). A rigid or schematic schedule of assembly dates within each prytany would have resulted in frequent assemblies on festival days, but it is clear from our sources that the council managed to avoid such conflict, accommodating its calendar to that of the archon and scheduling meetings of the assembly (on its calendar) on days not designated by the archon (on his calendar) as festival days.⁴²

In the late fifth century, however, the two calendars were of differing lengths. They began and ended at different times, and the gap between them would vary from year to year. Thus it would be hard, if not impossible, for members of the council, however well-intentioned, not to conflict with the archon's calendar and conduct business on at least some days that were set aside for festivals and sacrifices. A passage from Aristophanes' *Clouds* comments on just this state of affairs when, at the end of the parabasis, the chorus leader reports the complaints of the Moon, who is angry because the Athenians have not reciprocated her kindness.

She says she helps in other ways, but you don't keep
the days straight, jumbling them upside down;
she says the gods abuse her every time
they are cheated of dinner and set off home
without the feast marked on the calendar.
When it's time to sacrifice, you try cases and use the rack,
and often when we gods are fasting
in sorrow for Memnon or Sarpedon,
you laugh and pour libations; that's why—when Hyperbolos
was named this year's sacred ambassador—we gods
blew off his wreath: that will teach him
to keep the days of life in line with the Moon. (615–26)

The Moon's complaints have their source in the conflict I have described between the archon's lunar calendar and the council's solar one. The Moon speaks for the archon's calendar, which has performed a great service in regulating the city's religious observances. Instead of repaying that kindness, the city has adopted a solar calendar that diminishes the moon's prestige and turns the calendar upside down by allowing the council to schedule business on days set aside for sacrifice by the archon's calendar.⁴³

Despite this confusion, the new solar calendar remained in force for almost thirty years, leading me to suspect that such conflict was not the main reason the council reverted to a lunar calendar. After all, we in the modern world are used to discrepancies between calendar and fiscal years, between the twelve-hour clocks of everyday life and the twenty-four-hour clocks of trains and airlines, and between secular and religious calendars. It so happens that the Athenians abandoned the solar calendar around the time when their city was defeated by the Spartans, the Long Walls destroyed, and their empire and navy disbanded. With no empire to administer and no military procurements to pay for, the precision and regularity of the council's calendar would fade in importance. Under these circumstances, the public mood apparently swung in the other direction. In 403, the people of Athens charged Nicomachus with drawing up a list of traditional public sacrifices; this list was arranged by days and months of the archon's calendar and was displayed on a series of marble slabs.⁴⁴ Thus when the city's prestige was at its lowest ebb, it sought to revive and reaffirm both the dignity of its ancestral sacrifices and the authority of the traditional lunar year by the public display of this traditional listing.

In the decades before nostalgia set in, the Athenians administered their city (and their empire) in accordance with a calendar that was entirely independent of the traditional lunar year as well as largely independent of the traditional tropical year. It shared with the latter the summer solstice and little else: it was precisely measured, rather than roughly estimated, and was divided into ten arbitrary administrative periods, rather than punctuated by a series of astronomical events. This abandonment of traditional schemes for the adoption of a new, more rational one has an interesting analogue in the French Republic, which replaced more traditional measures with the scientific metric system and even (for a time) replaced the Gregorian calendar with a scheme involving metric months. It also has an analogue closer to home in the law courts. The *choes* and *amphoras* previously used as official liquid measures became in the law courts units of time independent of traditional measurement by the sun and its shadow, providing a new scheme designed strictly around the equal allotment of time to speakers. Likewise, the tropical year that previously organized the farmer's life provided the council with units of time totally independent of the familiar months and designed exclusively around the city's need for precise administration of its finances.

Comparable developments in the organization of historical time took place in the late fifth century. Whereas we tend to place past events on a large continuum, the Greeks inherited a qualitative distinction between a privileged age of heroes belonging to the past and the present age of ordinary men. Thus Hesiod says in *Works and Days* that after the race of bronze was destroyed, “Zeus the son of Cronus made another, a fourth, on the fruitful earth, more just and better, the divine race of hero men who are called demigods, the race before ours upon the boundless earth” (158–60). What distinguished past heroes from present mortals was not strictly their prior place in time but their superior stature: Hesiod considers them more just, better, and half-divine, adding that they now dwell apart in the Isles of the Blessed (166–73); Homer further observes that each one was stronger than two men today (*Iliad* 5.303–4). Hence accounts of heroic deeds at Thebes or Troy were less concerned with explaining what happened when than with providing exemplary models of behavior, in keeping with the view of heroes as not merely prior but superior.

The same is true of the generations that succeeded one another within the heroic age. When Homer says that Nestor lived through three generations (*Iliad* 1.250–52), his point is not to fix the time of the hero’s birth or emphasize his age but to establish his superior authority when he gives advice to Agamemnon and Achilles.⁴⁵

Follow my advice, since you are both younger than I.
I have dealt with men even better than you
and they did not disregard me.
I have never seen and never shall see men such as them,
like Pirithous and Dryas, leader of the people,
and Caineus and Exadius and godlike Polyphemos
and Theseus, son of Aegeus, who resembled the immortals.
They were born the strongest of men on earth,
they were strongest and battled the strongest,
utterly destroying the Centaurs in the mountains.
Coming far from the distant land of Pylos
I joined them since they called me in person.
I fought single-handed, but no mortal
now living on earth could fight them.
They listened to my advice and obeyed my words,
so you listen also since obeying is better. (1.259–74)

Likewise Penelope’s unrivaled wisdom is established by saying that not even such women of old as Tyro and Alcmene could match her (*Odyssey* 2.117–22). Homer’s catalog of the generations that have handed down the scepter of Agamemnon is an attempt not to date the scepter or indicate its age but to suggest its great authority.

Up stood lord Agamemnon

holding the scepter that Hephaestus fashioned.
 Hephaestus gave it to Zeus the king, son of Cronus,
 and Zeus gave it to Hermes slayer of Argus;
 lord Hermes gave it to Pelops breaker of horses
 and Pelops gave it to Atreus leader of the people.
 When he died, Atreus left it to wealthy Thyestes
 and Thyestes left it to Agamemnon to carry
 and to rule all Argos and many islands.

(*Iliad* 2.100–108)

Whereas poets in the archaic age invoked past ages and prior generations as sources of authority, later writers used these generations to date past events. Tyrtaeus, writing in the seventh century, emphasizes the valor of a prior generation when he says that “for nineteen years without cease the brave-hearted warriors, parents of our parents, fought for [the land]” of Messene (fr. 5 West). For Strabo in the first century, however, these same lines are a means of dating the First Messenian War: “Tyrtaeus says in his poems that the first conquest of the Messenians took place at the time of his parents’ parents” (8.4.10).

The process of appropriating the generations as a chronological device began in the fifth century. Around the beginning of that century, Hecataeus apparently constructed in his *Genealogies* a sequence of generations to date past events. Just as he rationalized myths (arguing that “the dog of Hades” was a poisonous snake, not the monster eventually named Cerberus [F 27 *FGrH*]), and just as he rationalized geography (making Anaximander’s map much more precise [T 12a]), Hecataeus rationalized mythical ancestry. He included among Deucalion’s descendants Phytios and Oineus, who introduced the vine and wine (F 15), and he inserted a generation between Deucalion and Hellen, presumably to allow for a lapse of time between the flood and the naming of Hellas (F 13).⁴⁶ The generational scheme was carried down from mythical to historical times by situating events in the reign of a king in Sparta or Athens (Diodorus 1.5.1). Rationalizing the various successions of heroes and kings would thus make it possible to calculate not only the generations between Pelops and Laius but also those between a mythical figure and the present day: as Herodotus reports, Hecataeus determined that sixteen generations separated himself from the gods (F 300 = Herodotus 2.143).⁴⁷

Hecataeus, however, was apparently surpassed in mapping the generations by Pherecydes, whose *Histories* listed the succession from Poseidon to Cadmus (F 21 *FGrH*) and from Ajax to Miltiades (F 2). By the time of Herodotus, the generations were used not only to bridge the gap between humans and heroes but also to date past events.

Herodotus used a genealogical scheme to place Paris's abduction of Helen "in the second generation" after Jason took Medea from Colchis (1.3) and to situate the Trojan War "in the third generation after the death of Minos" (7.171).⁴⁸ Even ancient relics could be dated by estimating the heroic generation to which they belonged: in Herodotus, a tripod would date "from the time of Laius son of Labdacus, son of Polydorus, son of Cadmus" (5.59), and the Scaeus who dedicated a second tripod would date "from the time of Oedipus son of Laius" in the following generation (5.60).⁴⁹

It perhaps goes without saying that detailed sequences of generations would require the use of writing, as would longer catalogs of kings, priests, or archons.⁵⁰ A broad distinction between the archaic respect for past ages and heroes and the fifth century's rationalized sequence of generations thus coincides with the transition from an oral to a literate culture. My concern is not to explain why the Greeks first developed an interest in chronology (which presupposes the existence of writing) but to examine how their interest in this changed, particularly in the latter half of the century.

Time and *Timé*

Hecataeus began the process of rationalizing mythical genealogy to create a systematic framework for past events. For relatively distant events, his scheme was more than adequate; but for more recent events, the succession of generations (or the similar succession of kings) was inadequate because approximate. A major development of the late fifth century was the invention and elaboration of more precise annual chronologies. By the end of the century, various Greek cities used the names of annual officials to date decrees. The truce between Athens and Sparta in 422/1 thus read: "the truce begins in Sparta with Pleistolas ephor, on the twenty-seventh of the month Artemisium, and in Athens with Alcaeus archon, on the twenty-fifth of the month Elaphebolion" (Thucydides 5.19).⁵¹ A historian could likewise use these names to date events, as Thucydides did in fixing the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War: "In the fifteenth year [of the thirty years' truce], when Chrysis in Argos was priestess her forty-eighth year, and Aenesias was ephor in Sparta, and Pythodorus had two more months as archon at Athens," the Thebans invaded Plataea (2.2).

Herodotus had earlier reported the name of the archon, stating that the Persian army reached Attica "when Calliades was archon in

Athens” (8.51); he cites the archon nowhere else, however, and this unique example probably owes more to vivid memories of a traumatic event than to chronographic innovation.⁵² Yet not long afterward Thucydides used the Athenian archon, Spartan ephor, and Argive priestess to establish the beginning of the war. His contemporary Hellanicus used archons to organize recent history in his *Atthis*, or *Attic History* (F 171–72 *FGrH*); priestesses to date legendary migrations in his *Priestesses of Hera* (F 79b); and victors at the Carneia to organize his discussion of musical discoveries, *Victors at the Carneia* (F 85a). Various local historians adopted similar schemes, “dividing their records either by the succession of kings or priests, or by the cycles of Olympiads, or by the officials appointed to annual office” (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *On Thucydides* 9).⁵³

The city of Athens responded to such schemes—and perhaps tried to control them—by publishing a list of archons soon after 424/3;⁵⁴ this official time line apparently began around 683 BCE and continued down to the present, making it possible to situate events of the recent past precisely, year by year. This list, moreover, was not simply a grid or time line. To situate an event in the archonship of Calliades or Pythodorus was to connect it with the archon’s authority and prestige, or *timé*, and to place it, as it were, under the auspices of the city’s democratic institutions. To date an event by the ephor would likewise invoke the prestige of Spartan institutions and the powers delegated by the aristocracy. By putting a list of archons on public display, the Athenians made it easier to date events with an annual scheme and promoted their own officials as the basis for a chronological standard. This local time line enjoyed considerable success. In the late fourth century, Demetrius of Phalerum used Athenian archons to date the pre-Socratic philosophers (F 1–2 *FGrH*), and the Parian Marble in the third century used them to draw up a Panhellenic historical time line.

These annual schemes recognized the authority of civic institutions. Just as natural benchmarks, such as sunrise and high noon, were upstaged in the law courts by units of measure regulated by the polis, so the inherited framework of generations marking out the past was replaced by annual chronologies established in each city. In the process, these annual schemes shifted authority from the past toward the present, from generations descended from mighty gods and heroes toward chronologies defined by the present-day office of priestess or archon.

Numbering the Years

The shift of prestige to the present went further when the more precise annual schemes were extended backward into the mythical past. Hellanicus, in a work entitled *Priestesses of Hera*, synchronized the approximate chronology of heroic generations with an annual model based on the priestesses of Hera in Argos: “the Sicels left Italy in the third generation before Troy, when Alcyone was priestess in Argos her twenty-sixth year” (F 79b *FGrH*).⁵⁵ The extrapolation of civic time back into the mythical past might also include days of the month, as when Hellanicus dated the sack of Troy to the twelfth of Thargelion, when Callisto was priestess in Athens (F 152b). This conquest of the past by civic time in turn made two further innovations possible. First, the process of extrapolating backward the succession of years allowed the chronologer to imagine past time as a continuum of years and to place events on this continuum by numbering backward from the present. Hence Herodotus notoriously used a list of Egyptian kings to calculate a period of 11,340 years in which no god had appeared in human form (2.142). Herodotus explicitly converted a generational model into a yearly continuum by estimating that three generations were equivalent to one hundred years, whereas later authors seem to rely on schemes in which the conversion was already made.⁵⁶ Thucydides, for example, says that the Boeotians emigrated from Thessaly in the sixtieth year after the fall of Troy and that the Dorians occupied the Peloponnese in the eightieth (1.12); he says there were about three hundred years from Ameinocles’ arrival in Samos to build ships to the end of the Peloponnesian War and about 260 years from the first naval battle between the Corinthians and the Corcyreans (1.13); and he likewise says that the Spartans had the same form of government for about four hundred years down to the end of the Peloponnesian War (1.18).⁵⁷

This arithmetization of the past might be carried back indefinitely: Hellanicus and Philochorus, for example, reportedly gave a period of 1,020 years from the great flood in Attica to the first Olympic Games (F 47a *FGrH*). Nevertheless, once the past is imagined as a continuum and this continuum is ordered numerically, that past loses its prestige. An abstract and “sophistic” numerical designation replaces both the authority of heroic generations and the prestige of civic office. Yet however radical this reinvention of the past, it was neither fully realized nor fully credible. One had to begin counting from somewhere. If one numbers from Ogygos, “whom [the Athenians] believe autochthonous, and in whose time the first great flood took place in Attica” (Hellanicus F 47a), or from the time of Heracles the ancestor of the Spartan kings (Herodotus 2.145), the numerical system

takes its beginning and hence its authority from either Athenian or Dorian legend. The conversion of past time into number is thus not fully realized. Yet if one numbers sometimes backward from the present, sometimes forward from the Trojan War, and sometimes from other points, the scheme remains relative and does not possess the authority to challenge that of heroes or archons.

This brings us to the second major innovation following the extension of civic time. The two problems of where to begin counting (shifting the locus of authority without replacing it by number) and of multiple places to count from (failing to establish a new locus of authority) were both addressed by Thucydides' revolutionary epochal system. By choosing the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War as a fixed reference point,⁵⁸ the historian adopts a scheme that relies not on heroic authority or civic prestige but on his readers' direct knowledge of this "world war." By showing that this war, "the greatest upheaval in the Hellenic world and in part of the foreign world as well, and so to speak in all mankind," (1.1) was much greater than the Trojan War (1.12), he adopts a scheme that effectively replaces the authority of myth and polis with that of collective experience. Counting forward by winters and summers from the outbreak of the war not only is more accurate, as Thucydides observes, but also replaces civic privilege with an impartial measurement of time.

One should note [events] by time and not feel confidence when in each place archons or those with some privilege signal the enumeration of names into the past. This is not accurate, since something may occur at the beginning or the middle or any time at all [in their term]. But counting by summers and winters, as I have done, one will find that since each amounts to half a year, there were ten summers and as many winters in this first war. (5.20)⁵⁹

Immediate and Transcendent Time

We can better understand Thucydides' innovation if we compare it with another epochal system that also had its origins in the late fifth century. As Plutarch reports, Hippias was the first to publish a list of Olympic victors.⁶⁰ This list, like the lists of archons or priests, provided a framework for past events and presumably began in the eighth century with the first Olympic Games. However, unlike the lists of archons and ephors, the list of victors was not annual, since the games were held every four years and were even sometimes cancelled because of war. Unlike the lists of kings and priests, however, the list of victors provided a detailed and regular framework, and unlike all other lists, the list of victors had a familiar and canonical starting point in the first Olympic Games. Hippias's list might therefore have

been used, as it was centuries later, to establish a numerical epoch, counting forward by Olympiads from the first games and specifying the year within an Olympiad just as Hellanicus specified the year within Alcycone's tenure as priestess. Yet there is no evidence that Hippias's list was used in this way. It may have contained information on when athletes began to compete naked (cf. Thucydides 1.6); it must have recorded notable events, such as the second victory of Dorieus of Rhodes and the double victory of Androstenes of Arcadia (Thucydides 3.8, 5.49); and it presumably allowed subsequent writers to place an event "in the Olympiad in which Oibotas won the stadion" (Philistus F 2 *FGrH*). But there is nothing to suggest it involved a numerical epoch.⁶¹

Hippias came from Elis, the polis that claimed the Olympic Games as its most prestigious institution, and his list served civic interests. No doubt the city of Athens, in publishing its list of archons, was attempting to establish as a standard time line the names of democratically selected Athenian citizens, and Hippias responded with a time line based not in Athens but in his own polis of Elis, which had a roster drawn not just from Athens but from many cities, parading not the names of citizens chosen by lot to serve the demos but the names of wealthy aristocrats who were victorious at the games.⁶² Hippias's scheme still relied on the name of an individual and the honor and prestige that the individual acquired.⁶³ In Hellenistic times, however, things were different. In the third century, Timaeus of Tauromenium made an accurate collation of the lists of Spartan ephors, Spartan kings, Athenian archons, Argive priestesses, and Olympic victors (T 10 *FGrH*); this famous achievement made it clear that chronography could no longer rely on the officials of a single polis, and it paved the way for the adoption of Olympiads as a Panhellenic standard.⁶⁴ In the second century, Eratosthenes of Cyrene converted the list of athletes into a purely numerical dating system. Taking the first games as his starting point, or epoch, Eratosthenes dated subsequent events by the number of the Olympiad in which they occurred. Empedocles the father of Meton, for example, was victorious in the 71st Olympiad (F 7) and Astyanax of Miletus in the 116th (F 8). From this numerical system, it was easy for Eratosthenes to calculate the 297 years from the 1st Olympiad to the invasion of Xerxes (F 1a) and for Dionysius of Halicarnassus to see that Cato's date for the foundation of Rome was the first year of the 7th Olympiad according to Eratosthenes (F 1b). Thus reliance on civic institutions was replaced by a Panhellenic scheme, and reliance on the honor of civic office was replaced by a numerical continuum.

The obvious parallel with numbering years from the foundation of

Rome or the birth of Christ reveals some of the implications of the Hellenistic system. The epochs of Rome's foundation and Christ's birth suggest that the entire narrative of human history may be subordinated to the larger or more transcendent story of Roman destiny or of Christian salvation. Likewise in Hellenistic times the various narratives of competing cities were subordinated to the larger story of Hellenic culture and its eventual hegemony. These parallels also underscore, by contrast, the nature of Thucydides' model. His chronology was different from both forms of Olympiad reckoning, relying neither on the aristocratic prestige of athletes competing in Elis nor on a grand narrative of cultural dominion.⁶⁵ However important Thucydides considered the Peloponnesian War, he made no attempt to make the outbreak of the war a universal epoch. He dated the migrations of Boeotians and Dorians by counting forward from the fall of Troy (1.12), not backward from the beginning of his war, and he dated the origins of naval power and of Spartan government by counting backward from the end of the war (1.13, 18), not from its beginning.

In other words, in rejecting civic time lines and their reliance on the prestige of public office, Thucydides made no attempt to replace them with some larger or transcendent continuum. Independent of a heroic framework that counts the generations forward from Heracles or Ogygos, and independent of a civic roster that counts the years backward from archon or ephor, Thucydides' chronology does not in any way subordinate events to a larger cultural or religious framework. His scheme is self-contained: having decided what period of events to relate, the historian simply numbers the years from its beginning to its end.⁶⁶

Time and Politics

The civic uses of time are neither fixed nor natural but are subject to revision as the needs of a community change. Innovations and revisions continued down through the Hellenistic period. In the measurement of daily time, for example, the single most important innovation in the Greek world took place in the third century, when sundials marking the seasonal hours first became widespread. The traditional, agricultural markers of sunrise, filling of the market, and high noon were thus supplemented by a standard scheme better suited to the cosmopolitan centers of the Hellenistic world. In the calendars measuring yearly time, a major innovation also took place in the Hellenistic period, when the conflicts among city calendars were reconciled by reference to the astronomical month *kata theon*, which

began with conjunction; setting all cities to the same lunar clock, so to speak, would greatly facilitate trade and cooperation. Finally, in measuring the past, there is a broad progression from the oral traditions of the archaic age, to the more detailed lists by generation and official in the fifth century, to the numerical and Panhellenic reckoning by Olympiad adopted by Hellenistic historians. Yet in the late fifth century, a period of unprecedented cultural change, experimentation in all three areas broke entirely free from traditional models. The introduction of timers to regulate legal proceedings involved units of time with no relation to the sun's movement across the sky. The detailed mapping of the solar year and its appropriation by the Athenian council involved a scheme independent of the lunar months. Thucydides' relative epoch for the Peloponnesian War created a model independent of all other chronological frameworks.

This spirit of experimentation in the late fifth century—in particular, a willingness to adopt new systems with little or no relation to old ones—may help to explain why these innovations were short-lived. The shock of the new eventually gave way to the reassuring astronomical precision of Hellenistic seasonal hours and lunar months *kata theon* and to the accurate and Panhellenic Olympiads. Yet for several very interesting decades, as Greeks in general and Athenians in particular were experiencing what I have called “present shock,” it seemed more helpful or suitable to separate the measurement of time from all larger schemes. Although the formal means to this end may vary, all of these innovations devote special attention in some way to the here and now, to a present that is not understood by reference to past (or future). The ideological implications will also vary; for instance, a scheme that is independent both of the heroic past and of the civic present might seem to reject aristocratic and democratic values alike. Both the water timers and the solar calendar, however, were adopted by a democratic government to improve its administration, while Thucydides' apolitical epoch seems to agree with his attempts elsewhere to distance himself from the democracy as he knew it. The radical changes under consideration in this book cannot be reduced to the maintenance or subversion of a specific set of values;⁶⁷ as the following chapters will show, the late fifth century witnessed new ways of organizing time that helped more broadly to articulate human temporal experience.

CHAPTER 2

Human Time

CHANGES OR innovations in different spheres of life rarely move in lockstep with one another, yet experiments in the practical realms of time measurement and management did roughly coincide with new developments in the intellectual understanding of time. For example, in both these spheres, we find the same broad shifts, first from a cosmic to a more human (though collective) framework for measuring or understanding time, then to a more detailed interest in its mundane complexities. In this chapter, I will argue that during the cultural crisis of the late fifth century, intellectuals developed strongly revisionist approaches to time, producing not only original ideas about time but also new means of expressing such ideas—for instance, the Sophist Antiphon found aphorisms and narrative especially effective at conveying an understanding of human time. A survey of earlier reflections on time will help to situate the striking new approaches to time developed by thinkers in this period.

TIME AND CHANGE

In his *Works and Days*, the earliest piece of Western philosophical verse, the archaic poet Hesiod reflected on time as both a practical and a moral concern. How can the poor peasant—living on a parcel of land and never far from hunger or destitution as crop failure, poor weather, lazy workers or greedy neighbors might at any moment destroy his livelihood—know when to sow and when to harvest, when to set sail and when to marry, or how to govern his actions to win the respect of neighbors and the favor of the gods? A small error could be disastrous, since, as Hesiod observes, “Zeus who holds the aegis is at one time of one mind and at another time of another, and it is difficult for mortal men to discern his will” (483–84). So Hesiod offers practical advice about when to cut back on the cattle’s feed (559–60), when to winnow the grain (597–98), and what day of the month is best for shearing sheep (774–75), as well as moral guidance on how to conduct oneself at a festival (722–23). Hesiod’s concern is not so much a pragmatic issue of timing—of shrewdly determining the opportune moment for a given task—as an attempt to align the secular events of peasant life with the rhythms of the stars and seasons and

somehow to align mortal conduct with the will of immortal Zeus. It is a challenging task, in which the poet contrasts himself with his brother Perses, who has not yet learned to follow these rhythms and to whom he gives advice. For instance, on managing his estate, Hesiod instructs him:

When Orion and Sirius reach the middle of the sky
and rosy-fingered Dawn sees Arcturus,
then, Perses, pick all your grapes and take them home
and set them in the sun for ten days and ten nights,
shade them for five, and on the sixth draw into your vats
the gift of cheerful Dionysus. (609–14)

As for relations with other men, Hesiod gives Perses the following advice:

Far-seeing Zeus grants prosperity to the person
who understands and speaks out for justice;
but if a man as witness willingly swears a false oath
and lies, and in incurable folly thus injures justice,
his descendants sink in obscurity,
but descendants of a man whose oath is true fare better. (280–85)

In such exhortations as these, archaic Greek thought, without denying the reality of change (which was so evident and so troubling), accorded greater authority to the stable and changeless world. The moral world of the gods, which has been subject to change as one generation of gods is overturned by the next (*Theogony*), has now achieved a permanent order and stability in the rule of Zeus (883–85, 892–93). The lesson of *Works and Days* is that although humans seem to inhabit a capricious world of hardship, nevertheless there is an order and rhythm in nature and the divine.

The Riddle of Change

In the centuries that followed Hesiod, reflections on time became more systematic, even as they still relied on the basic contrast between a more immediate world of change and an underlying or overarching realm of stability; and they became more critical, even as they continued to vest authority in a timeless world apart from mortal concerns involving time and change. Toward the end of the sixth century, Heraclitus deconstructed Hesiod's opposition between stability and change. That which seems to be stable and singular is, he argued, actually changing, plural, and comprises its opposites. In the words of his most famous formulation, "one cannot step into the same river twice" nor twice touch the same mortal substance (B91 D-K). What seems stable is not only changing but changing in the most

radical manner either to or from its opposite: “to souls it is death to become water, to water it is death to become earth, but water comes from earth and soul from water” (B36). Thus things become their opposites, and what seem to be opposites are actually the same: justice is strife (B80), “the most beautiful order is like a heap of random sweepings” (B124), “immortals are mortal, mortals are immortal” (B62), and day and night are one (B57). But if we accept that the one is many and the many are one and that the same things are whole and not whole, similar and different (B10), then time, like the cosmos, is both a stable, cyclical order and a chaotic flux.

In his only direct statement on time, Heraclitus uses the word αἰών, which implies the more stable time of generations or eternity (rather than χρόνος, which tends to suggest succession and change),¹ yet he associates it with random or unreflective movements: “time is a child at play, moving board-pieces—dominion belongs to a child” (αἰὼν παῖς ἔστι παίζων, πεσσεύων· παιδὸς ἡ βασιληΐη (B52 D-K). The paradox is simple and effective.² On the one hand, time is associated with the cyclical pattern of life and death (αἰών) and with an overarching order (βασιληΐη); on the other hand, it is associated with discrete and random movements, the impulsive moves of a child who can neither fathom nor develop a long-term strategy. To revise the conclusion of Charles Kahn, just as the finest *kosmos*, or “adornment,” is a heap of random sweepings, so the harmonious course of events consists of the thoughtless movements of a child at play.³ In typical Heraclitean fashion, the oracular pronouncement both conceals and reveals a seemingly inscrutable harmony.

Being versus Change

Parmenides responds to Heraclitus with a paradox of his own. Heraclitus maintained that order and flux are embedded in one another; Parmenides argues that the notion of an ordered world is meaningful only when divorced from the realm of phenomena. According to his poem, the path of truth can be concerned only with what is, not with what is not (B2 D-K); and what is must be changeless (B8.26–31), indivisible (B8.22–25) and perfect (B8.32–44). It therefore follows that change, time, and generation are all foreign to that which is.

It never was, nor will it be, since now it is all together,
one and continuous. What birth will you seek for it?
How did it grow? From where?...

(B8.5–7)

How could what is be later? How could it come to be?⁴

For it is not if it became, nor if it is going to be:
becoming is extinguished and destruction is unknown. (B8.19–21)

In addressing what is, it is not entirely clear whether Parmenides was more concerned (ontologically) with what really exists or (propositionally) with what can validly be asserted or (predicationally) with what can in fact be attributed.⁵ Regardless of the interpretation, he drew a clear contrast between the path of what is and that of what is not (B2), and he clearly excluded temporal change and becoming from the search for what is, thus presenting his listeners with the startling proposition that time and flux have no place in the path of true inquiry.⁶

This positive valuation of changelessness and timelessness was further elaborated in Zeno's denials of plurality and motion. In one famous paradox, he argued that the swift runner Achilles could not run the length of a stadium, because he must first cover half the remaining distance, then the next half, and so on infinitely many times (A25 D-K). In a second paradox, he argued that a flying arrow cannot move, because at any given instant its position is fixed in space, and so at no moment is it actually moving (A27). Whereas Parmenides argued that the familiar world of change and becoming must be left behind in following the path of what is, Zeno criticized our very notions of time and motion as logically flawed.⁷ Hence in a sequence that may seem odd to modern thinking, the opposition between change and being was first deconstructed by Heraclitus, then clearly marked out as fundamental by Parmenides and Zeno. Subsequent thinkers were thus confronted with two novel and incompatible claims that had to be addressed: are change and being in some (enigmatic) way the same, or are they fundamentally (and paradoxically) different?

In one sense, this impasse was foundational. It set the criteria for subsequent philosophical debate, asking questions that, in the short term, prompted Empedocles' and Plato's speculations on changeless being and, in the long term, anticipated the metaphysical concerns of Western philosophy.⁸ In another sense, the impasse reproduced tensions inherent in late archaic thought. A culture that had traditionally vested authority in the gods and heroes of an earlier time and had viewed them (whether on Olympus or in the Elysian Fields) as immune to the flux of mortal experience was beginning to ask how that transcendent authority might be reconciled with the more immediate concerns of human society and values. Heraclitus constructs a harmony between flux and order that is mysterious and hieratic and that subsequent thinkers, in attempting to secularize his

thinking, have demystified. The numbers of the Pythagoreans, the elements of Empedocles, and the seeds of Anaxagoras all parse more closely the connections between an unseen order and the present world of change, offering progressively more materialistic answers.

Time and Pattern

According to the Pythagoreans, the ordered cosmos consists of number and ratio or harmony (58 B4 D-K). Number in their view is not a timeless abstraction but (to Aristotle's consternation) a material entity with magnitude (B9–10) that orders material phenomena: "from the one and the undefined two come numbers, from these points, from these lines, from these plane figures, from plane figures solid figures, from these sensible bodies (of which there are four elements: fire, water, earth, and air); these change completely, and from them arises a universe that is animate, intelligent, and spherical, with the earth at its center" (B1a).⁹ The Pythagorean cosmos is, in the end, as perfectly ordered and spherical as the world of true inquiry is for Parmenides—not because change is alien to it, but because the outcome of change is the good (B11). Time therefore occupies a privileged place in this cosmos. Without time and void, which distinguish things from one another (B30), the world would be amorphous and homogeneous. As number is a material cause present in the world, so time is a material movement that encompasses it, a "surrounding sphere" (B33) that "contains all things."¹⁰ Yet paradoxically, just as the end of generated things is an ordered perfection, the end of time is a repetition and recurrence (B34) in which nothing is ever new¹¹ and in which motion and change are lacking (B22). Through the temporal nature of a material cosmos, time is eventually banished.

It is interesting to contrast Empedocles, who follows Parmenides in explicitly rejecting birth and death (B8 D-K), coming to be and passing away (B12). Yet Empedocles can reconcile Parmenides with the changing phenomenal world only by introducing four eternal elements (earth, air, fire, water [B6, 38]) and two eternal principles of union and separation (love and strife [B17]).¹² Change is therefore a remingling and interaction of things that do not change. Empedocles explains, "just as they never stop continually changing, so they are always motionless throughout the cycle," and "only these things are, and by running through one another, they become now one thing now another, and always forever the same" (B17.12–13, 34–35). As an aspect of eternal elements, change is secondary or accidental, yet it is also incessant: "these things never stop continually changing, now all coming together into one through Love, now each carried apart

through the hatred of Strife” (B17.6–8). Time and becoming somehow arise from being, from the differences and oppositions that define or construct the four distinct elements and two opposing principles. For the Pythagoreans, the changeable world is ultimately timeless, while for Empedocles, the timeless world changes incessantly.

Although the Pythagoreans and Empedocles reach different syntheses from different directions, they nevertheless share the same synthetic concept—namely, a cyclical account of time. In each philosophical system, the popular notion of time as rhythmically stable is developed into a cosmic cycle of recurrence in which temporal process eventually returns to its beginning. “If we believe the Pythagoreans,” Eudemus reports, “that the same things according to number come again, and I will speak to you with staff in hand, and you will sit like this, and everything else will be the same, then it is reasonable that time will also be the same” (B34 D-K). According to Empedocles, the coming-together of things and their carrying-apart form separate phases, the rule of Love (B27, 29) and the rule of Strife (B30–31), which alternate in a changeless cycle (B17.6–13). In either case, time and change are fully subordinated to a larger order outside the realm of mortal experience.

Seeds of Change

In this respect, the work of Anaxagoras marks an important new direction. In the world as Anaxagoras describes it, change through time is fundamental. The primordial world was undifferentiated, without color or other evident qualities: “Before these things were separated, when all things were together, not even any color was evident. The mingling of all things prevented it, of wet and dry and hot and cold and light and dark” (59 B4 D-K; cf. B1). In the beginning there was no motion or division until mind began the rotation: “And when mind began things moving, it was divided from all that was being moved, and as mind moved, all this was divided off. As things were moved and separated, the rotation caused them to be divided off much more” (B13; cf. B2). Once set in motion, the process of separation is irreversible and open-ended: “And mind governed the whole rotation, so that it began to rotate in the beginning. At first it began to rotate from a small area, but [now] it rotates more widely, and it will rotate even more” (B12). As Aristotle points out, Empedocles and Anaxagoras “both separate things out from an undifferentiated mixture, but they differ from one another in that the former has these things occur in a cycle, the latter just once” (*Physics* 1.4, 187a23–25). In other words, the perfect and timeless circle of

Empedocles (and the Pythagoreans) is replaced by Anaxagoras's linear and irreversible arrow of time. As Plato complains in rejecting the latter view, a cosmos disposed in this manner will not assume a shape or condition that is best or noblest but will change according to the properties of air, water, ether, and so on (*Phaedo* 97d–98c).

On the microcosmic scale, however, Anaxagoras seems to reject change through time. When we see hot things become cold or small become large, we must not conclude that change is fundamental. Unable to reject Parmenides' atemporality, Anaxagoras was forced, like Empedocles, to explain microcosmic change as an illusion: "The Greeks are wrong to believe in becoming and perishing. No thing comes to be or perishes but it is mixed together or separated out from things that exist; so they would be right to call becoming 'mixing' and perishing 'separating'" (B17 D-K). The result was a remarkable system of infinitely divisible substances, in which all things are already present in one another: "and since great and small have parts that are equal in number, so too all things would be in everything; nor can they exist apart, but all things have a share in everything" (B6).¹³ With his inclusion of the infinite possibility for change within changeless being, Anaxagoras cuts through the Gordian knot created by Parmenides. The argument has striking parallels to that of Alfred North Whitehead, for whom "every actual entity is present in every other actual entity" and "the cause is objectively in the constitution of the effect."¹⁴ Because Anaxagoras cannot reject changeless being, he must include what was prior and what will ensue within what is present. On the microcosmic level temporality exists, but only in the infinite divisibility of unchanging substance.

On the one hand, with the contradictory nature of his answers, Anaxagoras is possibly the least satisfactory of these early thinkers who addressed the problem of being and change. Macrocosmic, historical time is linear and unpredictable, effecting fundamental change, while microcosmic, particular time is illusory in merely revealing what already exists. The contradiction is even more pronounced if we note that although the matter of which the world is comprised does not change, the world as a whole changes fundamentally and unpredictably. On the other hand, the thinking of Anaxagoras does mark a revolutionary advance. Whereas his predecessors felt obliged to find some accommodation between change and being, reconciling in one way or another the authority of a timeless order with the experience of change, Anaxagoras was willing to sever the two. He would grant to Parmenides that being is eternal, while making the novel claim that the arrangement of the cosmos is subject to radical change. It may be true, Anaxagoras conceded, that

mind, by setting the process in motion, “arranged things that now are and things as they will be” (B12 D-K), but he maintained that how things will be cannot be predicted: “one cannot know the number of things separated off, either by word or by deed” (B7). His position is analogous to that of modern thinkers who concede determinism and atemporality among the objects of the physical sciences, while claiming free will and temporality for human actions and experiences; as the present study will show, his acceptance of macrocosmic change paved the way for important new approaches in the later fifth century.

SOPHISTIC TIME

A principal achievement of the Sophists was to turn sustained rational inquiry away from the cosmos or the physical world and toward human and social experience. They were concerned not with the conflict between phenomenal change and a timeless being or truth but with human interactions in rhetoric and politics. As Jacqueline de Romilly has put it, their interest in “immediate, concrete human experience...sparked off a veritable intellectual and moral revolution.”¹⁵ This revolution, I argue, included a new interest in time as a necessary feature of human life. Yet two gaps, the gap in the corpus of sophistic texts and a gap in contemporary scholarship on these thinkers, impede an appreciation of this aspect of their thought.

First, the works of most of the Sophists, like those of their predecessors, survive only in fragments, leaving a collective gap. My attempt to reconstruct their views of time therefore involves a considerable amount of speculation, but this speculation draws on the fragments we possess, relying on reasonable inferences about the methods or approaches of each thinker. Fortunately, some of Gorgias’s speeches survive complete, while a good number of fragments remains from the treatises of Antiphon, affording us firmer ground on which to stand when considering their views.

Second, a perplexing gap in scholarship hinders the job of reconstruction. Despite a resurgence of interest in the Sophists in the past two decades, scholars have yet to consider their ideas about time. Surveys of ancient views on time begin either with Plato and Aristotle or with the earlier pre-Socratics, leaping from there to Plato and ignoring the intervening sophistic movement and the second half of the fifth century.¹⁶ Although there are excellent studies of individual Sophists and of the sophistic movement as a whole, none of these addresses the reflections of the Sophists on time or temporality. This gap has arisen, I suspect, because time has traditionally been

considered a suitable object of cosmological inquiry but not of sophistic reflections on the human realm. In this study, I would like to correct this omission by drawing attention to the Sophists' original perspectives on time.

Human Time

Protagoras was the first and in many ways the most influential of the Sophists. Both his flair for challenging received opinion and his financial success are reflected in Hesychius's brief summary: "he was the first to invent eristic arguments and the first to charge his students a hundred minas" (A3 D-K). He was also apparently the first of the Sophists to pay attention to time. Diogenes Laertius, having given a sketch of Protagoras's life and major doctrines, provides us with a somewhat fuller summary of this Sophist's achievements: "He was the first to charge a fee of a hundred minas, and he was the first to distinguish the parts of time, and set forth the power of the right moment, and establish contests of words, and provide speakers with clever ploys" (9.52 = A1 D-K). Each item in Diogenes' list seems to help establish Protagoras as the first and foremost of the Sophists. By charging substantial fees, he made intellectual pursuits the business of a professional, not an amateur. By establishing contests of words (λόγῳ ἀγῶνας) with two sides to any issue (cf. B6a), he helped to inaugurate critical dialectic. By arming speakers with clever ploys, or σοφίσματα, he made this dialectic available to a larger constituency. Finally, by emphasizing the importance of the right moment (καίροῦ δὲ ὕψαινον), he showed that persuasion and judgment are matters of effectiveness and appropriateness in a given situation rather than of absolute truth. All of the preceding, with the puzzling exception of the second item in this list, have been recognized as prominent features of both the sophistic movement in general and of Protagoras's teachings in particular.

Diogenes' words "and he was the first to distinguish the parts of time" (καὶ πρῶτος μέρη χρόνου διώριξε) have generally been construed to mean that Protagoras distinguished the tenses of the verb;¹⁷ since this is hardly a sophistic achievement, this particular item presumably denotes—by means of an odd metonymy—Protagoras's general interest in language and grammar.¹⁸ More recently it has been shown that the phrase "parts of time" cannot refer to the verb; consequently this phrase in Diogenes has typically been ignored or set aside as mysterious.¹⁹ Elsewhere I have shown that the "parts of time" are most plausibly understood as past, present, and future: when Diogenes credits Protagoras with first distinguishing the

parts of time, he means that the Sophist was the first to distinguish past, present, and future in a philosophically significant way.²⁰ It goes without saying that Protagoras was not the first to distinguish past, present, and future in a commonplace or conventional way: as Homer observes, the seer Calchas knew “what was and would be and was before” (*Iliad* 1.70), and Hesiod invokes the Muses as beings who speak of “what is and will be and was before” (*Theogony* 38). Such expressions as these reflect the obvious facts that it is hard to know the past and impossible (without having special powers) to know the future, whereas Diogenes implies that Protagoras first introduced a philosophical or technical distinction among them.

In this, Protagoras was followed by subsequent philosophers who distinguished the parts of time in various ways. Plato contrasted the present, which belongs to eternal being, with the past and future, which entail generation in time (*Timaeus* 37e–38a). For Aristotle, past and future are divisible parts of time, while the now is neither a part nor divisible (*Physics* 4.10, 218a5–7) but is the juncture of past and future (*Physics* 4.13, 222a10–12). The present, in other words, is outside time not because it is eternal but because it lacks extension. The Stoics distinguished the parts of time in various ways. According to Apollodorus (*SVF* III p. 260), time as a whole exists, but this is not strictly true of its parts—past, present, and future. According to Chrysippus (*SVF* II 509, 518), only the present exists, while the past and future merely subsist. Thus for Plato past and future are less real because less eternal, whereas for Chrysippus they are less real because less substantial. It is clear, therefore, how Protagoras can be seen as standing at the head of an important tradition. What is not so clear is the precise nature of the Sophist’s contribution, about which, given our limited evidence, I can offer only a plausible suggestion.

Temporality plays an important role in Protagorean relativism. According to Protagoras’s most famous doctrine, “of all things a person is the measure, of those that are that they are and of those that are not that they are not” (B1 D-K).²¹ Scholars range widely in their interpretations of this fragment and its implications, from those who take it as implying a moderate, or “soft,” relativism to those who see it as entailing an extreme, or “hard,” relativism.²² Regardless of the interpretation (and assuming we can draw on such commentators as Sextus Empiricus), if people are the measure of all things, not only will different people have different accounts, but so also will the same person at different times. As Sextus notes in glossing the “measure” fragment, “people apprehend different things at different times according to their various dispositions” (*Pyrrh.* 1.218 = A14). He explains that the disposition of the body may vary according to the

activity it is engaged in at various times—sleeping or waking or any other kind of condition (1.219)—or according to the various conditions of the body at different times of life (1.217). In this construction, as a person’s disposition varies in time, so will his or her apprehension and understanding of the world. Whatever the details of Protagorean relativism, it is intimately dependent on the subject’s place in time. Whereas for Heraclitus time and change pose the problem of order in the objective world, for Protagoras they are bound up with the issues of subjective apprehension and knowledge.

This interest in temporality is perhaps suggested as well by the next item in Diogenes’ list. After noting that Protagoras was the first to distinguish the parts of time, Diogenes adds that he was also the first to set forth the force or importance of the appropriate moment (καίρο ὁ δὲναμν). *Kairos* has a definite practical and rhetorical aspect: namely, the importance of choosing the right words and the right arguments in a given situation.²³ This was presumably the concern of Gorgias, who (according to Dionysius) was the first to write on the subject (B13 D-K; see the next section of this chapter). I suspect that for Protagoras the power of *kairos* had to do with the temporal aspect of his relativism. If the subject’s disposition and perceptions change from moment to moment and from year to year, we can speak of understanding and judgment not in fixed or absolute terms but only as appropriate to a particular set of circumstances. This relative aspect of what is suitable or appropriate would extend not only to perceptions concerning the phenomenal world but also to moral judgments and ethical conduct. The author of the *Dissoi Logoi* articulates this broader sense of *kairos* when he says that “in summary, everything at the appropriate moment is good, but at the inappropriate moment shameful” (πάντα καιρῷ μὲν καλὰ ἐντι, ἐν ἀκαιρῷ δ’ αἰσχρά, 2.20). Such qualities as goodness or shame are thus not absolute but specific to the individuals and circumstances involved.

Temporality is thus truly important for Protagoras, and his particular interest in the divisions of time correlates with his more general interest in distinguishing among the appropriate objects of knowledge. In his most famous formulation, not only is “what is” relative to a given subject at a given time, but different classes of objects are knowable in different ways. For example, Protagoras states: “Concerning the gods, I cannot know either that they exist or that they do not exist, or what they are like in form. Many things prevent knowing, the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life” (B4 D-K). In other words, since as human beings we have no experience or perception of the gods, this particular class of objects is unknowable. Another class of objects, that of events of the past,

would seem to be made up of things intermediate between knowable and unknowable, that is, of things that can be known only indirectly. In particular, Protagoras's title *On the Original State of Things* (B8b), together with his account of early human society (Plato *Protagoras* 320c–322d), suggests he viewed the events of human prehistory as meaningful objects of inquiry that, even though they cannot be experienced directly, can be satisfactorily deduced from present experience and observation. The objects of another class, the events of the future, are knowable neither directly nor indirectly. However, unlike the gods, who are entirely unknowable to humans and will remain so, events of the future will eventually occur and be known and are hence potentially knowable. We do not know exactly how Protagoras developed this distinction regarding time and human knowledge, but Diogenes' report does seem to imply that he maintained some such distinction, and his title *On Things in Hades* (B8h) raises the intriguing possibility that he applied this distinction to the question of an afterlife.

Earlier thinkers sought in various ways to resolve the conflict between temporal change and atemporal being, but Protagoras was the first to make time relative. He made it relative first of all to the subject by showing that each situation, time of life, or appropriate moment had its own independent significance. He also made time relative to its objects by showing that past, present, and future were knowable in fundamentally different ways. Hence the earlier contrast between temporal and atemporal worlds was no longer a concern. Temporality was unavoidable for the subject, and a person's whole knowledge of the world was conditioned by his or her disposition at a given moment. With regard to its objects, temporality was fractured: knowledge of the past became viewed as fundamentally different from knowledge of present or future. It has often been noted that the Sophists in general and Protagoras in particular humanized philosophy by turning its attention from the physical world to the human. We might add that Protagoras "temporalized" philosophy, or made it more relative to time, by situating both subject and object in specific time-bound contexts. For example, Protagoras, as Plato reports, argued that justice is not a fixed abstraction but a range of conduct imprinted on the individual in a particular society.²⁴ For instance, whether or not a person is disposed by nature to act justly, he will, with care and practice and instruction, generally become accustomed to act in ways that his society finds acceptable: "just as writing teachers trace letters with the stylus for children who are not yet good at writing, then give them the tablet and make them write

following the outline of the letters, so also the city traces laws, the discoveries of good lawgivers long ago, then makes people rule and be ruled following these, and whoever goes outside these it punishes” (*Protagoras* 326d; cf. 327b, 323d). For Protagoras, then, all meaningful knowledge is temporal; it arises in a human being who lives in time and who, through time, acquires experience of social norms and practices. In [chapter 1](#), I noted that historians in the fifth century extended civic time backward, mapping the time line of archons or priestesses all the way back on the mythic past. Protagoras extended human time outward, making the subject’s place in time and the temporal nature of knowledge a framework for the entire realm of intellectual inquiry.

The Contradictions of Time

Temporality is an essential part of Protagorean relativism: because knowledge or experience of the world occurs at a particular time, what is true or valid at one time may not be true or valid at another. This view is skeptical or “negative” in that it rejects absolute or universal judgments concerning the world, but at the same time it constitutes a positive theory that values the specific moment and the power or importance of its attendant circumstances. In distinguishing past, present, and future, Protagoras may likewise have introduced a troubling skepticism by observing the severe limitations to our knowledge of past as well as future, while stressing more positively the different kind of knowledge appropriate to each temporal realm. Gorgias extended Protagoras’s views in radical and paradoxical ways, raising deeper questions about time and temporality.

Whereas Protagoras stated that a person is the measure, suggesting that what is and what we know depends on the individual and his or her situation, Gorgias stated that existence, knowledge, and communication are simply untenable. He claimed “first, that nothing is; second, that even if it is, humans cannot apprehend it; third, that even if apprehensible, it cannot be expressed or described to a neighbor” (Sextus Empiricus *Adv. Math.* 7.65 = B3 D-K). Thus while Protagoras shifted attention from universal objects of knowledge and experience to the relative truths of each situation, Gorgias pressed further, claiming that each situation and each faculty is absolutely independent. Knowledge, perception, and language not only have their separate spheres and distinct objects but are also hopelessly estranged from one another. We can therefore neither perceive what is known nor describe what we perceive. This is not a positive doctrine but a typically Gorgianic paradox: by taking Protagorean relativism to

its logical extreme, we find that thing, thought, and word—which must relate to one another if we are to have any understanding of the world—are no longer interconnected.

This general paradox contains a more specific, temporal paradox: whereas what is and is known must presumably be timeless and unchanging, what is perceived depends on time and place. Such ancient commentators as pseudo-Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus provide the details of Gorgias's argument, the former reporting the paradoxical doctrine of Gorgias and then paraphrasing the arguments he used to support it. After showing that not being is not (or does not exist), Gorgias reportedly went on to argue that if something is, it is either generated or not generated: "And if it is not generated, it is not limited (he follows the arguments of Melissus). But the unlimited is not anywhere, since it is neither in itself nor exists within something else; otherwise there would be two or more unlimited things, one contained and one containing. Moreover, that which is nowhere does not exist (according to Zeno's argument about space). So for this reason it is not ungenerated" (XMG 979b.20–26; cf. Sextus Empiricus *Adv. Math.* 7.68–69). Although we lack Gorgias's exact words, the general argument is nevertheless entirely consistent with his approach and with the problems inherent in distinguishing what is from specific existence in space and time. If we grant that being is ungenerated, we are immediately contradicted by the all-too-evident fact that what is must exist somewhere—that is, it must exist in time and place. So if we assume the ungenerable nature of what is, then what is does not exist somewhere, and this leaves us with the added contradiction that what is does not exist.

This evident delight in contradiction belies the portrait of Gorgias as a nihilist and the interpretation of his philosophy as, to paraphrase Mario Untersteiner, a "tragedy of knowledge."²⁵ From the logical contradictions of being and becoming, to the verbal contradictions of his antithetical style, to his paradoxical aphorisms ("the deceiver is more just than the deceived, and the deceived wiser than the undeceived," B23 D-K), Gorgias found a palpable pleasure in probing the problematic status of knowledge and language. His theory of persuasion, as one scholar has noted, "might be usefully viewed as the embodiment of a paradox," since language is powerful and autonomous yet helplessly isolated from its referents.²⁶ In general, given Gorgias's pleasure in the play of paradox, we might more accurately speak of his "comedy of knowledge."²⁷ This pleasure and play are evident not only in the paradox of being, which is both irreducibly temporal and atemporal, but also in the problem of past, present, and future.

If Gorgias's paradoxical world pushes the limits of Protagorean relativism, so does his view of time. I suggested earlier that when Protagoras distinguished the "parts of time," he was arguing for crucial distinctions in how we understand past, present, and future. Gorgias went further, exposing the difficulties involved in understanding any of the divisions of time. Because no temporal realm can be known with any confidence, all accounts of the world are equally false: "How many people persuaded and persuade how many people concerning how many things, shaping a false argument! For if all people concerning all things had memory of the past and [knowledge] of the present and foreknowledge of the future, there would not be a like account in like manner, since as things are it is not easy to remember what is past or see what is present or foretell what is to come" (*Helen* 11 = B11.11 D-K). By pushing Protagoras's reservations about past, present, and future to an extreme, Gorgias's assertions end up flattening time: rather than each of the divisions of time being knowable in different ways and to different degrees, past, present, and future are equally inscrutable and therefore ultimately indistinguishable.

It does not follow, however, that time is unimportant. Generally speaking, knowledge of the world is fallible precisely because it is temporal: as the passage in *Helen* makes clear, we create a false *logos* because past, present, and future are obscure.²⁸ In particular, the temporal nature of human experience is implicated in the problems and paradoxes of human action and judgment. For example, where Protagoras would have said that proper conduct is relative and depends on the individual and the situation, Gorgias (according to Plato's account) goes further, arguing that what constitutes "proper conduct" in one situation does not necessarily constitute "proper conduct" in another. As he points out, different individuals have to deal with entirely different considerations: the virtue of a child or that of a slave is different from that of a man, whose virtue consists in managing the city's affairs, helping friends, and harming enemies, or of a woman, whose virtue consists in managing the household and obeying her husband. He explains, "there is another virtue for a child, for female and male, for an old man, for a free man if you like, and for a slave" (*Meno* 71e = B19 D-K). Hence there is no common ground for different people at different times. Furthermore, when one person is asked to render judgment, not only must he consider both words and deeds, both accusations and refutations, both the short term and the long (as Gorgias's Palamedes reminds his listeners), but his dilemma is also compounded by the passage of time, which does not allow him to correct faulty judgments: "good men should always take great care not

to make a mistake, with things that cannot be corrected all the more than with those that can; this is possible for those who think ahead, but incurable for those who change their minds. And it is like this when men pass judgment of life or death on another man, as you do now” (*Palamedes* 34 = B11a.34). Thus where Protagoras argued that what constitutes sound judgment depends on the particular situation, Gorgias demonstrates that even in a given situation sound judgment is quite problematic, since the subject must not only weigh contradictory claims but also act within the paradoxical parameters of time, which require that we anticipate an unforeseeable future and be mindful that we cannot change the past.

The problem of time is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Gorgias’s account of *kairos*. I have suggested that for Protagoras the relative meaning makes the appropriate moment important: what is proper to say or do or perceive at one moment may not be proper at another. For Gorgias, however, the appropriate moment is fundamentally discrete, and there is no way to estimate it in advance. Those whom he praises in the *Funeral Speech* chose rightly in the right moment, finding a reasonable coherence rather than absolute precision, but the rule they followed offers no real guidance to others: “these men attained an excellence that is divine and a mortality that is human, often preferring a reasonable gentleness to strict justice and coherence of speech to precision of law, thinking this the most godlike and widespread rule: to say and not say and do what is necessary at the necessary time” (B6 D-K). Presumably precisely because Gorgias attached such importance to *kairos* without being able to prescribe it, Dionysius complained that not even the Sophist himself, although the first to try to write about it, defined the art of the proper moment (B13; cf. A24; Plato *Phaedrus* 267a). This theory of the moment as self-sufficient was put into practice when Gorgias spoke in public; Philostratus reports, “[it seems that] Gorgias began impromptu speaking, for he came into the Athenian theater and was bold enough to say ‘name a topic’ and first proclaimed he would take this risk, showing that he knew everything and would rely upon the moment [ἐφ’ ὧς καὶ τὸ καὶ] in speaking about anything” (A1a; cf. A1.3, A19, Philostratus *Lives of the Sophists* 203.19). As the demands of each moment are unique yet unforeseeable, it brings with it a danger and uncertainty that is enacted in impromptu speaking.²⁹ Inasmuch as each moment is independent and discrete, we might, again paraphrasing Untersteiner, speak of the “tragedy of time” or—given the exhilarating possibilities of any moment—the “comedy of time.”

While it would be misleading to overemphasize the nihilism of Gorgias, it would be just as misleading to try to salvage some sort of

positive Gorgianic doctrine. To begin with, Gorgias was not a phenomenalist with a positive confidence in the existence and validity of the present moment and present sensations; rather, he maintained that past, present, and future were equally obscure, and he stressed the importance of the moment as contradicting, in playful and enlightening ways, our belief in the persistence of things and attitudes. But neither was this Sophist a libertarian. He did not assert positivistically that each individual and each moment enjoys unfettered autonomy and freedom; he instead pointed out the importance and difficulty of looking toward the future and regretting the past (*Palamedes* 34).³⁰ In general, Protagoras asserted the relative autonomy—even dignity—of temporal experience, and Gorgias brought to the fore the problems, confusions, and contradictions that this experience entails. This is not to say that Gorgias was any less concerned with turning philosophy toward the human sphere than was his fellow Sophist. On the contrary, in playfully exposing the limits of knowledge and the impediments to judgment, Gorgias took the temporal experience of his listeners quite seriously.

Prosaic Time

Both Protagoras and Gorgias were members of the first generation of the sophistic movement and pioneers in philosophical humanism. For Protagoras, this entailed an interest in time, not only because (as for Heraclitus and Parmenides) temporal experience seemed to preclude the possibility of atemporal knowledge, but also because human understanding was inescapably embedded in the experience of time—an observation shared and strengthened by Gorgias, who revealed the contradictions inherent in temporal experience. However, it is one thing to shift the grounds and the premises of inquiry and another thing to demonstrate the usefulness of such a shift—hence there was widespread interest among subsequent Sophists in demonstrating the practical advantages of such things as the comprehensive mastery of information (Hippias) or knowing how to behave in socially acceptable ways (Prodicus).³¹ With regard to time, there was likewise a shift from the provocative claim that time was anchored in human experience to the more practical demonstration of how this could be so. The latter I call an interest in “prosaic time,” because these thinkers explore the temporality of everyday experience; more specifically, they are the first to describe in detail the banal uncertainties, indecisions, hopes, and regrets of day-to-day living.

Democritus was arguably the first to reflect in detail on the nature

of prosaic time. In a large collection of fragments (sometimes rejected as spurious precisely because they are prosaic),³² he described the pleasures and difficulties of living in time. “One should recognize,” he said, “that human life is feeble and of brief time and confounded with many disasters and difficulties” (B285 D-K). His intent in these fragments is not so much to prove a general truth as to examine life’s difficulties. For example, he observes, “raising children is a treacherous thing: with good luck you find it full of conflict and concern; with bad luck it surpasses all other pains” (B275; cf. 276, 278). Democritus notes that on the path of life, each stage has its own advantages and troubles: “Old age is perfect disfigurement, it has everything, and everything is incomplete” (B296); yet “strength and beauty are the good things of youth, while good sense is the flower of age” (B294). In describing these problems and uncertainties, the philosopher encourages his listener to make the most of each stage in turn: “the old man has been young, but it is unknown if the young man will reach old age; a good accomplished is better than one to come that is still unknown” (B295). More generally, Democritus admonishes that we should try to enjoy this life since it is short, and he postulates that “life without banquets is a long journey without an inn” (B230). In Democritus’s view, accepting life and accepting the advantages and difficulties of each of its stages therefore requires embracing the passage of time and accepting the uncertainties of the present without yearning for past or future: “Fools strive for long life without enjoying long life” (B201), they “live without enjoying life” (B200), and they “strive for what is absent, wasting the present, which is more valuable than the past” (B202).

Paradoxically, Democritus’s other theme is the need to escape or withdraw from the temporal world. He argues that we must try to avoid being seduced by the pleasures of life or overwhelmed by its hardships, and he insists that we should recognize the difficulty of life, because this recognition will lead us to moderate our desires and anxieties and will hence free us from these temporal concerns. As the fragment quoted earlier continues, one should recognize that human life is feeble, “so that one may be concerned with moderate possessions and measure hardship by what is necessary” (B285 D-K). If child rearing is treacherous, his best advice is not to have children (B276); his second best is to adopt, since one then has some choice over what the child will be like (B277–78). However, he also advises enjoying life, claiming: “It is best for a man to spend his life with as much good humor and as little pain as possible. This will happen if one finds pleasure not in mortal things” (B189). One way to find such detachment is by leaving home: “life in a foreign country teaches self-

sufficiency, since the sweetest cures for hunger and hardship are gruel and straw” (B246). More generally, argued Democritus, it is attained by prudent thought (B210); a wisdom that cannot be alarmed is worth everything (B216), and “it is suitable for humans to take more account of the soul than of the body, for perfection of the soul restores a depraved body, but bodily strength without reason improves the soul not a bit” (B187). Hence even as he dignified the pleasures and hardships of temporal experience, Democritus urged an escape from temporality through wisdom, intelligence, and care of the soul.

This very paradox is, of course, central to Democritus’s atomic theory, which states that the world is fundamentally material and perishable even as it consists of immortal atoms. As reason allows the philosopher to discover eternal atoms in the ever-changing phenomenal world, so it allows him to find detachment amid the vicissitudes of temporal experience. This contrast between the present but less real temporality of the phenomenal world and the invisible atemporality accessible to the philosopher accounts for Democritus’s apparently conflicting views of time. Sextus Empiricus ascribes to Epicurus and Democritus the notion that “time is a day-like and night-like appearance” (*Adv. Math.* 10.181 = Democritus A72 D-K). In the visible material world, time is not a phenomenal thing but is itself the changing of things, most evident in the contrast between night and day (cf. Epicurus cited in A72; Lucretius 1.459–63) and presumably in all forms of change and motion.³³ The invisible atoms, however, exist and move in void and time, and since the atoms are eternal, the time and void in which they move are likewise eternal. Democritus drew on some such an argument or assumption when he used the premise that time is eternal to prove that ungenerated things do exist (Aristotle *Physics* 8.1, 251b16 = A71). Unfortunately, we cannot know more precisely how Democritus related the temporality of visible phenomena to the eternity of invisible atoms.

Generally speaking, the Sophists turned philosophy from the physical to the human world, in the process turning away from the view of time as a feature of the mutable cosmos to the view of time as an aspect of human experience and knowledge. With his thick and detailed description of temporal experience, Democritus built on and extended these sophistic insights even as he constructed an ideal world of invisible matter in which motion was purged of change and time of temporality. This stands in direct contrast to Empedocles’ simpler scheme that allows time a more fundamental role in the opposing effects of love and strife. Thus Democritean dualism paved the way for Plato’s rejection of the material world, at the same time that his thick description of temporal experience paved the way for

Antiphon's more realistic version.

Democritean temporality also anticipates Plato in its turn away from the polis. Protagoras anchored human knowledge in the polis by describing civic excellence as the goal of learning and effective rhetoric as the means to that end.³⁴ Democritus, by contrast, rejected dependence on the polis even as he had a keen awareness of the profoundly political nature of human experience. Human security, he argued, depends on a well-governed polis: "Affairs of the polis should be considered greater than all others so that it will be well run and so that one neither engage in unseemly strife nor grant oneself power contrary to the common good. For a well-run polis is the greatest guide and all things depend upon it; when this is safe, all is safe; when this is destroyed, all is destroyed" (B252 D-K). His detailed interest in civic institutions includes a general observation that when the powerful help the poor, civic concord and all good things arise (B255), as well as the particular claim that "poverty in a democracy is as preferable to so-called prosperity among the ruling class as freedom is to slavery" (B251). Yet the philosopher's desire for detachment and self-sufficiency extends to the political realm as well. Not only does living in a foreign land teach self-sufficiency (B246), but "the wise man will inhabit the whole earth, since a noble soul's homeland is the entire universe" (B247). In other words, the temporal world that Democritus embraces is profoundly civic and democratic, but so is the temporal world that he rejects.

MATERIAL TIME

Democritus is deeply paradoxical in his approach to time. With his extensive and sympathetic interest in the pains and pleasures of temporal experience, he takes human time more seriously than the early Sophists, yet he uses this very interest to motivate individuals to withdraw from the temporal world and find self-sufficiency in the more stable realms of mind and soul. Another thinker of this period, the Sophist and orator Antiphon, had an equally sympathetic interest in the pains and pleasures of temporal experience, but he chose to consider these on their own terms and did not advocate withdrawal.

Antiphon's views on time are most clearly presented in the fragments of *Homonoia*, or *On Concord*. Most of these are brief, and those that have not been rejected altogether as spurious have been criticized as commonplace platitudes.³⁵ There are, however, no adequate grounds for rejecting these fragments, which taken as a whole offer a fascinating and highly original account of ordinary

temporal experience.³⁶ One quotation speaks of the larger temporal continuum in which we live: “living is like a day’s watch, and the length of life is like a single day (so to speak) in which, after glimpsing the light, we hand it on to others who follow” (B50 D-K). For Antiphon, the point is not simply that life is pathetically brief (as in Homer or Mimnermus) but that time is a never-ending and irreversible continuum within which each human life is a short span or segment. Revising Heraclitus’s image of irrationality (“time is a child at play, moving board-pieces,” B52), a fragment of *Homonoia* points out that what is past is past and cannot be undone: “one cannot take back one’s life like a board-piece” (B52). Yet although the course of time cannot be reversed, it is nevertheless open and uncertain, directed to no end and organized around no climactic moment, or *peripeteia*: “all of life is remarkably easy to condemn, my friend; it has nothing outstanding or great or awe-inspiring, but everything is small and weak and short-lived and mixed with great vexations” (B51). Still, this continuum, however mundane, is all we have, and we must strive to make the best of it: “Some people do not live the life each day brings but make preparations with great eagerness as if they had another life to live, not the one each day brings; meanwhile time is neglected and gone” (B53a). Antiphon thus warns us against squandering time, “the most costly thing of all to buy” (B77). Democritus made similar observations on the “feeble and shortlived” nature of human life beset with difficulties (B285); but whereas for Democritus awareness of these limitations was the means to an end, a spur to practicing moderation and self-sufficiency,³⁷ for Antiphon there is no suggestion that the awareness of time serves such a purpose—exploring our humble temporal experience is an end in itself.

The longest fragment commonly attributed to *Homonoia* offers a useful illustration; to some extent it offers a gloss on the plagues or vexations of everyday life, describing the additional hardships that come with marriage and with raising children. But the passage is of particular interest on two counts. First, it transfers to a young adult male the fears and anxieties about marriage that were more typically associated with women.³⁸ Second, it places these concerns on a kind of time line, mapping out the problems and uncertainties that a man might encounter at various stages in life. The fragment begins as a young man is about to enter a new stage in life.

Well then, let his life advance forward, and let him desire marriage and a wife. That day, that night, is the beginning of a new life, a new fate. Marriage is a great gamble for a man. If the wife turns out to be incompatible, what should he do in this situation? Divorce is difficult, making enemies of his friends, men

who think and breathe like him, whom he thought worthy and who thought him worthy [of this alliance]. But it is also hard to keep such a possession, getting vexations where he expected to acquire pleasure. (B49.1–8 D-K)

The decision to embark on marriage, which may have seemed fairly simple, turns out to be exceedingly complex, not only because the young man cannot foresee whether his wife will be compatible, but also because their marriage will now involve him in important social alliances not easily broken. Moreover, as Antiphon goes on to say, even when the woman is compatible, she will inevitably bring more work for the man, who will now have two people to look after.

So isn't it clear that a wife, even if she is after a man's heart, gives him no less affection and distress than he gives himself, since he must now look after the health of two bodies and their sustenance and their moderation and their reputation? Well then, suppose children are born as well. Then everything is full of worries, and the youthful skip is gone from his mind, and his face is no longer the same. (B49.25–32)

At this point the Sophist moves on to the next stage of a man's life, with all of its uncertain joys and tribulations. In enumerating the inevitable hardships, he never implies that this hypothetical young man should not marry or have children (unlike Democritus, who would avoid the troubles of rearing children and probably even of marriage altogether);³⁹ nor does he offer him answers or advice. Instead he provides a detailed and sympathetic diagnosis of the prosaic yet difficult process of daily living, in which human time, as an endless and inescapable continuum of ordinary yet unforeseeable events, is a source of pain.

A Thick Continuum

Since any temporal experience belongs to the present, Antiphon's discussion raises questions of whether and how we have access to past or future. If we are caught in the mundane continuum of prosaic time, how can we know about the watch that precedes ours or the one that follows it? Antiphon was apparently aware of this issue, and two fragments from the *Art of Rhetoric*, or *Rhetorike Techne*,⁴⁰ suggest that for all his focus on the present moment, he did not divorce the present from past and future. For one thing, Antiphon argues, our confidence concerning events in the past and future cannot compare with our immediate knowledge of the present: "It is natural for us to perceive things that are present, at hand, and beside us; but it is unnatural to preserve a clear longing for things once they are out of our way" (71 B-T).⁴¹ Antiphon's point here has to do with the strangely temporal nature of memory: we perceive the present in accordance with nature

(κατὰ Φύσιν), but remembering the past is an unnatural act (παρὰ Φύσιν) inasmuch as it is a yearning (πόθος) for what is gone. According to Antiphon's argument, we try to relive the past through memory—we try to re-create or reimagine that moment, for example, when our baby was born or when we heard that John Lennon had been killed—but the attempt is unnatural to the extent that any moment can only be lived in the present. It is likewise with the future: however vividly we anticipate events to come—the wedding day, for example, or the job interview—the exercise is unnatural because we can only live in the present moment.⁴² Nevertheless, Antiphon does not suggest, as does Gorgias, that past and future are unknowable. Even if we are in some sense trapped in the present, past and future can still be glimpsed: “Things that are gone are confirmed by signs [σημείοις], and things to come by traces [τεκμηρίοις]” (72 B-T). It is not clear what Antiphon's specific argument was here. Did he mean that events in the past—the Trojan War, for instance—can only be known by drawing inferences from signs provided by Homer and other poets? Would he go even further and say that a personal past—what I may have done or experienced yesterday or last year—can only be known from the signs of memory? Did he mean that specific events to come—a solar eclipse, for example—can be known from traces familiar to astronomers? Or was he thinking of less precise inferences from traces of personal experience (for example, I am reasonably certain that traffic will be heavy around five o'clock this afternoon)? Although any temporal experience naturally belongs to the present, Antiphon asserts that signs and traces somehow extend this experience into the past and future. This reasoning is quite different from that of Gorgias, who says that past, present, and future are equally hard to grasp (*Helen* 11). Where Gorgias professes radical skepticism, Antiphon suggests that from our position in the present, we are constantly, if indirectly, engaged with past and future.

Unfortunately, we do not have enough fragments to complete this picture, but the general outline I have drawn is confirmed by the remains of Antiphon's other major work, the *Truth*, or *Aletheia*. In one fragment that may be from *Aletheia*, Antiphon says that “men consider more credible things they see with sight than things which must be proven εἰς ἄφανές [in the dark, or in secret]” (35 B-T).⁴³ Several fragments report that in *Aletheia* he coined new words to distinguish things that are seen from those that are not and things that are felt from those that are not. His purpose is apparently to be as clear as possible about the nature and limits of knowledge: things that are believed without sight may perhaps be as true and as real as those that are seen, but if they fall outside the range of our sight, we must

acknowledge that they are ἄοπτα, “things unbeheld,” not in the class of things seen (B4 D-K; cf. B6–7), and if they fall outside the range of our senses, we must acknowledge that they are ἀπαθή, “things unfelt,” not in the class of things sensed (B5). He likewise distinguished between sensation and mind, apparently maintaining that some objects belong to neither “those that one who sees furthest sees with sight [ὄψις] nor those that one who perceives furthest perceives with the mind [γνώμη]” (B1).⁴⁴ Just as Antiphon rigorously distinguishes things known by sight or feeling or mind from those known by other means, he distinguishes traces of past and future from more immediate temporal experience in the present. Where Gorgias’s playful paradoxes blurred these distinctions, Antiphon’s aphorisms gave each one its due.

Antiphon, who describes the experience of being in time without abstracting from it a doctrine concerning the existence or nature of time, is a materialist philosophically and formally. His interest in experience on its own terms reflects his philosophical materialism. In his *Truth*, or *Aletheia*, he denies that the world is governed by design, or πρόνοια (B12 D-K), and he prefers to speak not of how things are organized (which would imply design) but of how they are placed or disposed (διαθέσθαι, B14). He would not argue that physical sensations take precedence over other considerations, since “for all humans the mind leads the body concerning health and disease and everything else” (B2). He explains that in medicine, the body is the source of information from which the mind draws inferences that may prescribe for the body a curative treatment or regimen; it does not follow that the mind is superior to the body or that there is a path to truth that somehow transcends the world of sense perception.⁴⁵ In fact, there is no room in Antiphon’s materialistic philosophy for abstract mathematical concepts. Aristotle dismissed Antiphon’s attempt to square the circle, because it did not proceed from geometric principles (*Physics* 1.2, 185a14–17; B13). I suggest that this is exactly Antiphon’s point: he rejects geometric principles because their abstraction is at variance with observed material phenomena. According to Antiphon, if we inscribe a polygon of sufficiently many sides, it cannot be distinguished from the circle (B13). If the geometer objects that it is still a polygon and not a circle, Antiphon will answer that if we cannot discern any difference, then there is no difference. He maintains that a circle is something we see, not an insensible abstraction; it is something that looks perfectly round. Antiphon concludes that if the polygon of sufficiently many sides looks perfectly round, the problem of squaring the circle has been solved.⁴⁶ In the same way, Antiphon argues, an abstract or immaterial notion of time

is meaningless. He notes that human experience is fundamentally temporal; the events we experience take place in an uncertain and prosaic present. In Antiphon's view, just as the roundness of a circle cannot be separated from the lines in sand or on paper that constitute the circle, knowledge of time cannot be separated from the temporal experiences of which it consists. To speak of "time itself" is thus meaningless—it is speculating in the dark, εἰς ἄφρονές. As Antiphon stated in a cryptic phrase, "time is a thought or measure," not a substance (B9).⁴⁷ For Antiphon time is a necessary feature of everyday experience by which we understand and measure our place in the world; it is not a thing or substance like the eternal time of Democritus. In his allegiance to the human world of time, Antiphon is thus a more thoroughgoing materialist than his contemporary Democritus.

A Thick Narrative

Antiphon's materialism is formal as well as philosophical. As a philosopher, he refuses to abstract a thing or substance called time from the human experience of being in time, just as he refuses to abstract ideal circles from the shapes we perceive and draw. As a writer, it seems he likewise refuses to generalize about temporal experience or impose an ordering principle on it. He observes what some people do—squandering time, failing to make the most of each day—and gives a detailed account of what a typical man might experience over the course of his life. Yet Antiphon never seems to claim a privileged vantage point from which this experience can be reduced to laws or truths or generalizations. This is not a simple proposition. Any narrative or representation orders, simplifies, and abstracts; to fully represent the thickness and indeterminacy of experience would require the equivalent of Lewis Carroll's map—reproducing the world "on the scale of *a mile to the mile!*"⁴⁸ Rather than attempt such a reproduction, Antiphon "abstracts" thickness and indeterminacy, so to speak, with his detailed account of the stages in a young man's career, together with his refusal to anticipate what choices the man might make and his reluctance to endorse certain alternatives or to judge the choices once made. The protagonist in Antiphon's story is typical and nameless, but the temporal world in which he finds himself approximates the challenges and uncertainties of being in time. This formal or narrative materialism involves a profound sympathy, whereby one believes in and cares about individuals but does not judge them or their actions. Antiphon purportedly took this sympathy one step farther by curing and consoling those in trouble. Plutarch's writings report: "he composed

an *Art of Avoiding Distress* just as doctors treat those who are sick; and in Corinth he set up a room by the agora, advertising that he could treat with words those in trouble, and he would find the causes and reassure those who were distressed” (A6 D-K). Philostratus adds that “he announced ‘Painless Lectures,’ claiming that no one could tell him of a pain so terrible that he could not remove it from the mind” (A6).⁴⁹ Antiphon took an interest in the pains and troubles of temporal experience on their own terms, and it was precisely his thoroughgoing materialism that allowed him to do so.⁵⁰

Antiphon’s sympathy for the plight of the individual as a temporal being entails something close to amorality; hence we might say that the Sophist was also an ethical materialist. If the individual’s own experience can and should be taken on its own terms, abstract notions of right and wrong are irrelevant, as would be conventional notions of justice. The individual’s conduct in any situation should be determined by pondering pleasure, pain, and any other material consequences of his or her actions. For example, in deciding whether or not to marry, a young man must weigh all the consequences. Antiphon states in *Aletheia*: “Life belongs to nature, and death too, and life for men comes from what is good for them, and death from what is not good for them. But things established by the laws as good for one are chains upon nature, while those established by nature are free” (B44A.3.25–4.8 D-K). We might describe this view, from a modern perspective, as a rudimentary utilitarianism,⁵¹ but this would be to empty Antiphon’s critique of its revolutionary force (to favor the material concerns of individuals over the conventional values of the community was a radical proposition in any Greek polis and a dangerously antidemocratic one in Athens).⁵² Antiphon not only issued this challenge but acted on it—he was a leading figure in the oligarchic coup of 411 BCE that overthrew the Athenian democracy (Thucydides 8.68).⁵³

Democritus presents two striking paradoxes: that of a materialist who dignified temporal experience while giving priority to the world of atemporal atoms and that of a self-proclaimed democrat who nevertheless counseled withdrawal from the political realm. Antiphon represents a different paradox. The thinker who expanded Democritean views and emphasized the dignity of the individual and of his or her situation was an ardent opponent of the polis that took greatest pride in extending dignity and freedom to all citizens. The point, of course, is that the demos proclaimed a collective freedom and autonomy, while Antiphon the philosopher championed a personal autonomy that may have legitimized the oligarchs’ attempt to restrict freedom to a privileged few. The normal meaning of

freedom in fifth-century Athens was therefore quite different from that in Western (particularly American) ideology, which tends to associate democracy with individual freedom. Likewise, Antiphon's sympathetic and humanistic interest in the problems of temporal experience debunks the modern assumption that materialism and humanism are necessarily opposed. The present moment with its present action has a radical openness in Antiphon that is absent in Gorgias or Democritus. The freedom of the present is neither a playful paradox nor a spur to moderation but a moment of uncertainty, autonomy, and weighty responsibility. For Antiphon, this freedom included not only the monumental decision to overthrow the democracy but also the responsibility for the outcome of such a decision. When the democracy was restored and the other oligarchs fled into exile, he and Archeptolemus remained in Athens to stand trial. His self-defense speech, although famed for its eloquence and praised by Thucydides (8.68),⁵⁴ was not successful; Antiphon was ultimately executed for treason, and his body was cast out unburied from the city.⁵⁵

In the course of the fifth century, philosophers, historians, and members of the polis alike reexamined time in profound, if not always similar, ways. If we choose to abstract from their efforts a narrative of intellectual history, we can point to two separate revolutions. The first revolution was broadly temporal, replacing the authority vested in the atemporal worlds of myth and being with the temporal worlds of the polis and its human inhabitants. Crucial moments in such a change were the dating of mythical events by archons and priestesses and the recognition that a person's place in time constitutes a measure of what is. The second revolution was particularistic, replacing the collective authority of the polis and of men in general with the autonomy of local events and specific individuals. Crucial moments in this change were (1) the adoption of idiosyncratic schemes for dating the Peloponnesian War and managing affairs of the council and (2) the assertion of the individual's priority in deliberation and action. Together, these two revolutions point to the late fifth century as a period in which time and temporality were closely examined and profoundly reinterpreted. Yet the abstraction of such a historical narrative smooths over significant differences, neglecting what Antiphon would call the uncertainties of prosaic time. The reevaluation of time according to particular civic and human contexts was indeed a widespread phenomenon; however, the scientific efficiency of the council's solar calendar, the local epoch invented by Thucydides, and the ethical freedom advanced by Antiphon are radically different constructions arising from different concerns and different situations. If hindsight reveals important continuities, each

novel construction also constituted a distinct and deliberate act, one that was creative, hazardous, and ultimately irreversible—the irrevocable move of a game piece. It is time to examine three such moves in greater detail.

CHAPTER 3

Present Situations

EURIPIDES

ATHENIAN LITERATURE of the fifth century, by virtue of its increasing attention to the present, shares in the broad development this study has traced in other fields. Whereas archaic epic, generally speaking, looks toward the past, invoking the authority of a heroic age, classical tragedy enacts the social and political conflicts of the present. As Vernant describes it, the “historical moment of tragedy” involves a (negative) scrutiny of archaic, heroic values as well as a (positive) use of legal debate to engage current questions of human responsibility.¹ One might even claim that the genre is, by its very nature, more temporal than epic—more attuned to time and more attuned in particular to the pulse of the present. After all, tragedy was performed live; there was a single performance for the entire polis, as spectators and performers alike shared in the moment of reenactment. It thus seems to provide unmediated contact with temporal experience. De Romilly explains:

Tragedy settles in a clear portion of time and obliges us to live along with it, minute by minute, as if it were the present. Being a direct imitation of life, with no storyteller between us and the action, it has to follow the experiences and emotions of the characters in their very continuity. Therefore it goes, without stopping, from beginning to end, according to the inner rhythm of time.²

Critics today may balk at the formal determinism by which, according to de Romilly, the conditions of performance dictate a drama’s understanding of time, as they will likely resist the essentialist notion—implicit throughout de Romilly’s *Time in Greek Tragedy*—of a rhythm of time waiting to be discovered; however, it is true, in a general sense, that fifth-century tragedy marks an important shift in temporal perspective. Although the content of tragedy remained the traditional, mythic stories of a distant past (with such interesting exceptions as Aeschylus’s *Persians* and Agathon’s fictional drama),³ the genre is less concerned than epic with commemorating past events and more concerned with exploring how events unfold and the issues or conflicts involved.⁴ This chapter focuses on Euripides, who not only

takes part in this general development but also presses it further than his predecessors, subverting the special privilege of the past in order to describe in detail the challenges and uncertainties of the present.

My approach to time in Greek tragedy therefore differs from that of de Romilly. The strength of her book *Time in Greek Tragedy* is its generous sweep, situating each playwright's notion of time within his literary world-view, making Aeschylus interested in the time of divine justice, Sophocles in the time of heroic conflict, and Euripides in the time of human psychology. I am less interested in evolutionary literary history and more interested in a curious moment in the late fifth century; less interested in progress toward a psychological rendering of time and more in one particular way of representing it. Aeschylus and Sophocles each have an important and original understanding of time, but rather than attempt a comprehensive study here, I shall instead discuss the earlier playwrights chiefly as a means of illustrating and highlighting Euripides' particular use of time. Other scholars have thoroughly explored the complexity of Euripides' plots, especially in his "intrigue plays,"⁵ and while I shall touch on this, my main focus will be the temporal milieu of his characters, meaning their particular situations and the considerations or obstacles they face. In the first main section of this chapter, I shall show how Euripides weakens the "grip of the past" by presenting the plot as less dependent on preceding events (time past) than in Aeschylus and Sophocles; in the second, I shall consider the techniques he uses to present this temporal milieu (time present) as self-contained—not just a zone in which things happen, but a sphere with its own causes and consequences, motives and errors; and in the third, I shall consider some implications of "living in the present" both for characters onstage and for the audience of Athenian citizens.

TIME PAST

Almost all Greek tragedy—indeed, much of Greek literature—has a special connection with the past insofar as it takes its subject matter from the shared repository of myth. Since each new work enters into dialogue with the past, reshaping or reinterpreting it, the authority or prestige of the past is not absolute but must constantly be reckoned with as it need not in modern literature. In a real sense, that which is present in Greek literature—or that which Greek literature makes present—is the world of the past. In tragedy the effect of this is somewhat ambivalent: staging the action makes it much more immediately and tangibly present for the audience, yet at the same

time, behind this heightened immediacy is a new awareness of distance—that is to say, the new technologies of representation on stage (mask and costume, chorus and orchestra, *skene* and *auloi*) help conjure into life a body of myth that is becoming ever more remote. This tension between distance and presence might have been resolved entirely by taking the subject matter of tragedy not from the mythical past but from a fictional present, as Aristotle reports that Agathon once did.⁶ But Agathon's experiment did not catch on, and the surviving tragedies instead find various ways to play out the tension between past authority and present reenactment.

The Voice of the Past

In Aeschylus, characters in the dramatic present turn to the past as a realm with special authority. If it is hard to understand what is happening or why things are happening as they are, the dramatic past may contribute toward an answer. At the beginning of *Agamemnon*, for example, the watchman on the palace roof describes a sense of dread that pervades the palace. Fear, instead of sleep, stands over him (14), and he grieves for the house's misfortunes (18), but he cannot and will not explain the source of this dread—there is a great ox on his tongue (36–37). All would be clear if the house itself could speak (37–38), but both the watchman and the palace maintain their silence, and the first attempt at explaining this present dread is that of the chorus in its famous *parodos*. With its very first words, the chorus describes the past: ten years of war to avenge the crime of Paris (40–59), in which Zeus Xenios punished the Trojans, but which brought crushing pain to Greeks and Trojans alike (60–67). The moral ambivalence of the expedition to Troy is spelled out in the song that follows, in which the chorus dwells on the terrible price Agamemnon paid in sacrificing his daughter.

And when he put on the yoke of necessity,
breathing his spirit's evil swerve,
impure and unholy, then his mind
changed to utter ruthlessness.

.....

Her father told servants to pray
and take her, like a goat on the altar,
with robes falling round,
then eagerly lift her and gag
her beautiful mouth
to ward off a voice
cursing the house.

(218–37)

The chorus concludes, as the watchman did, by refusing to speak: “as for what followed, I have not seen and I do not tell” (248). The house cannot speak, nor can these Argive elders, but the past has spoken, telling of an expedition morally flawed from the very start. As the dramatic action proceeds toward the climactic horror of Agamemnon’s murder, the characters continue to plumb the past, as the past speaks louder and clearer. The Greeks were shamed both by Paris and by Helen (385–426), and the interminable war only brought grief and resentment at home (427–74). The Greek victory at Troy was bought at the cost of intolerable suffering for both the warriors at Troy (551–71) and the old men left behind (799–804). While Agamemnon won glory, Clytemnestra nursed fears and resentments (858–94). Crime has remained unavenged since Atreus murdered the children of Thyestes (1214–26), and the crimes against Thyestes fed Aegisthus’s desire for justice and revenge (1577–1611).

In Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, the dramatic past is thus a continuous backdrop, invoked and recalled by characters and chorus alike—in song, speech, and dialogue and at various points throughout the dramatic action—in their attempts to understand the present. Haunted by fear and foreboding, the play’s characters ask: How could this situation have arisen? Why is such horror possible? In what kind of world can a victorious king be slaughtered? The past tells us that it happens because Aegisthus and Clytemnestra have long been nursing grudges against Agamemnon; because the Greek cause, however just, has been pursued at the expense of violence against Iphigenia and intolerable suffering for the Greeks; and because, in the world of this play, crime and injustice must somehow be expiated or avenged.⁷ Although the present by itself leaves much unsaid, the voice of the past can speak through it and render it more intelligible.⁸

In this first play of the *Oresteia* trilogy, a tension between the past and the immediate present of events onstage—from the watchman’s fears to the tangible implements of murder displayed by Clytemnestra—helps to make sense of the present. In the second play, *Libation Bearers*, the tension becomes stronger, as Orestes steels himself for the task at hand and must summon up all the authority of Apollo’s prior oracle and all the horror of his father’s murder to justify the act of matricide. Finally, in the third play, *Eumenides*, the tension becomes insurmountable, and with violent dislocations of time and space, Orestes is wrenched into a dramatic future—democratic Athens, where the voice of the past can be charmed into silence. While we have no other complete trilogies with which we might make comparisons, the freestanding *Persians* by Aeschylus recalls *Agamemnon* in its use of time and the way in which the past is used to

make sense of the present. In *Persians*, the dramatic present enacts a grief and sense of loss (culminating with the rending of Xerxes' robes at the end of the play) that gradually become intelligible through a messenger's report of the immediate past at Salamis and Darius's ghostly account of earlier hubris at the Hellespont.

Tracks of the Past

In Sophocles, characters in the dramatic present turn to the past in a different way. It is not so much the authority of the past as the perspective it affords that makes the present intelligible. *Oedipus the King* begins, like *Agamemnon*, in a mood of uncertainty, as king and priest puzzle over the terrible and inexplicable plague that is destroying Thebes. The present is frightening, but Oedipus is not at a loss for words, confident that he can find some way to avert the plague and save the city (58–77). This will require a sustained and persistent interrogation of the past. Through Creon we are told of King Laius and of his murder by robbers, which has caused the plague (103–31). From Jocasta we learn of the oracle given to Laius and of the exposure of the son born to him and Jocasta (703–22). Oedipus himself repeats the story of his childhood in Corinth, the rumors of his illegitimate birth, and his murder of a man on the road to Delphi (774–813). From the messenger in the play we learn that Oedipus was a foundling, abandoned on Mount Cithaeron by a servant from the house of Laius (1015–46). A servant tells, under duress, that the child he exposed, the infant Oedipus, was the son of Laius and Jocasta (1123–81).⁹ As the past is retold, the reason for the plague becomes clear, as does Oedipus's own identity, and in hindsight the oracles delivered to Laius and Oedipus turn out to be true. Yet the past here is a source neither of higher authority nor of deeper meaning as it is in Aeschylus. Instead of turning to the past because a necessary part of the answer resides there, the protagonist in Sophocles gathers up clues from the past that have no special meaning or authority individually but together let him discern an otherwise hidden truth. The chorus says to Oedipus when his true identity is known, “all-seeing time has found you out against your will” (1213). The sentiment is a common one in Sophocles, where “all-seeing and all-knowing time unfolds everything” (fr. 301 *TrGF*), and “time uncovers all things and brings them to light” (fr. 918 *TrGF*). Sophocles' technique is to some extent similar to that of Aeschylus, with the formal difference being that Aeschylus lets the past speak through the lyrics of the chorus, while Sophocles prefers the exposition of dialogue and rhesis.¹⁰ There is also an ideological difference involving the authority of the past. At issue in Sophocles is not the inherent authority of the past but the larger

perspective—the transtemporal overview—that uncovering the past makes possible.

Since *Oedipus the King* is in some ways an exceptional play, it is worth noting that Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* makes a roughly similar use of time. The play begins with Deianeira's famous assertion that although folk wisdom says one cannot judge a life before its end, she already knows hers is heavy and unfortunate (5). Her bold transposition, situating the *krisis*, or "judgment," not at the end of her life but in the present moment, turns out to be justified as we learn of the oracle concerning Heracles: that today he will either die or live and find happiness (79–81). The nature of this present crisis nevertheless remains mysterious, and only with the gradual revelation of past events—Deianeira's courtship by Achelous and Heracles; Heracles' labors and long absence; Heracles' servitude to Omphale, sack of Oechalia, and love for Iole; Nessus's attempt to carry off Deianeira and his instructions concerning his poisoned blood—does the meaning of this moment become clear: first (apparently) that Heracles' troubles are finally over, then (tragically) that he has been killed by his jealous but unwitting wife. Although there is no single protagonist like Oedipus to gather these clues from the past, the spectators nevertheless acquire a synoptic understanding of Deianeira's critical moment.¹¹ For Aeschylus, a character in the dramatic present is able to appreciate the importance of the past and learn from it; for Sophocles, a character in the present can stand back from the course of events and see how they fit together; but for Euripides, as this chapter will show, a character in the present is fully immersed in the complexities of his or her temporal experience. Thus Euripides reserves for the present the privilege that Aeschylus accords to what is prior in time and that Sophocles accords to what is synoptically outside of time.

The Past Demystified

Whereas Aeschylus and Sophocles tend to begin with present foreboding or crisis, in the course of the drama progressively invoking or recalling the dramatic past, Euripides begins with an exhaustive narration of past events. The prologue speaker sets out all the details of the dramatic past necessary for the spectators to understand the present action. For example, *Hippolytus* opens with the prologue speech of Aphrodite, who tells how Hippolytus reviled her while honoring Artemis, how she has planned to punish the youth, and how she set her scheme in motion by causing Phaedra to fall in love with him (10–42). In the long prologue to *Ion*, Hermes first tells of his own

birth, then explains how Apollo raped Creusa; how Creusa exposed the resulting child to die; how Hermes, at Apollo's request, rescued the child and had it raised at Delphi; how Xuthus came to marry Creusa and how infertility brought the couple to Delphi; and how Apollo plans to reunite Creusa with her son (1–81). The parallel of the latter play with *Oedipus* is telling: we have a similar story of a child's conception and exposure, rescue and adoption by foreigners, and subsequent visits to Delphi. But the past that is gradually uncovered in Sophocles is spelled out from the start in Euripides. As a result, the past is desiccated and emptied of authority. The dry catalog of prior events in the prologue speech provides needed information without treating it as a source of special meaning. As a consequence, the dramatic present has greater autonomy, and the characters' statements and actions must be understood on their own terms. In Aeschylus and Sophocles the past has or acquires a "presence" in the dramatic action, but in Euripides the power of the past over the present recedes.¹²

It is not just the formal technique of the narrative prologue that demystifies the past. In Euripides' *Electra*, for example, the chorus sings two odes that subvert the authority of heroic models. The first occurs after Orestes returns, not as the conquering hero Electra has been waiting for, but fearful and in disguise. The chorus recalls the glory of Achilles as he joined "the famous ships that with countless oars once went to Troy" (432–33). Escorted by nymphs, dolphins, and his mother Thetis, his glory is embodied in his golden shield, helmet, and sword, all adorned with deeds of valor. The glorious image is suddenly shattered at the end, as the chorus observes that the king of warriors was killed by a woman's infidelity and that she will be slaughtered in turn (479–86).¹³ Just as Orestes cannot live up to Electra's expectations of heroic valor (lines 336–38 hold out the example of Agamemnon), the ode's image of glory at Troy is deflated by mention of the murders that follow.¹⁴ The second ode follows the old man's recognition of the reluctant Orestes and Orestes' departure on his cowardly mission to kill Aegisthus at sacrifice. The song tells the story of the golden lamb that Thyestes stole to seize power from Atreus (699–726) and concludes with a splendid image of divine justice: Zeus demonstrated his disapproval by turning the stars and the sun backward in their courses (727–36). Then the chorus adds:

So they say. But I
hardly believe that
the golden sun turned and
changed its scorching place,
bringing humans misfortune
all for a mortal quarrel.
Humans' frightening stories

promote worship of the gods,
but forgetting them, you murdered your
husband, mother of famous children.

(737–46)

According to Euripides' chorus, we cannot believe that the gods express their will so clearly, and Electra and Orestes must plan their revenge without any assurance that what they are doing is right. As they plan to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, they might appeal to the authority of the past either by recalling the splendor of the kings at Troy (a splendor to be avenged by a warlike Orestes) or by recalling the gods' disapproval of Thyestes (a disapproval that warrants punishing Aegisthus). Yet the chorus undermines both options, leaving the human agents to justify their actions on their own terms, in the dramatic present.¹⁵

Some plays involve a more literal distancing of the plot from its mythical antecedents. *Helen* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* use an extreme geographical contrast between the Greek and barbarian worlds to separate the events onstage from their mythical context. Offstage in *Helen* are Sparta and Troy, the family that raised Helen and the warriors who fought for her, along with all the weight of the obligations and responsibilities these entail; onstage is a Helen who has lost any contact with that familiar world. This Helen was spirited away to Egypt by the gods for their own purposes, so her behavior is no longer constrained by that other world (even if she is now constrained by a more imminent threat from Theoclymenus). Likewise, in *Iphigenia*, offstage are Argos and the royal house of Atreus and all those touched by the violence that has corrupted it; onstage is an Iphigenia who seems to live in a parallel universe, neither cut by the sacrificial knife nor tangled in the intrigues that followed her apparent death. The weight of that past is still felt in Argos but not among the Taurians, where Iphigenia (like Theoclymenus) enforces her isolation by killing all foreigners. In both cases, Euripides toys with these parallel worlds by making them collide in the persons of Menelaus and Orestes, but this game is only possible because the worlds are so clearly distinct. One interesting manifestation of this gap comes in the latter play, when Orestes proves his identity to Iphigenia. The corresponding scene in Aeschylus's *Libation Bearers* stresses the natural bond between brother and sister by having Electra hold Orestes' hair to her own and press her foot into his footprint. Euripides instead stresses family history by mentioning maternal and paternal ancestors, recalling the terrible quarrel between Atreus and Thyestes, events involving Iphigenia at Aulis, and the notorious contest for Oenomaus's daughter Hippodamia (*Iphigenia among the Taurians* 806–26). Yet from Iphigenia's point of view, this past is, if

not meaningless, remote, and her present detachment is reflected in the tokens by which she recognizes Orestes: the names of Tyndareus and Pelops (806–7), the weavings she made of the golden lamb and the sun’s altered course (813–17), perfume sent by her mother to Aulis and the lock of hair she sent in return (818–20), and the spear that is now an heirloom of Pelops’s ancient victory (823–26). Here among the Taurians, vestiges of these fabled past events are Iphigenia’s only connection to her long-lost brother.¹⁶

Elapsed Time

What remains of the past once it has been demystified, desiccated by the formal prologue and emptied of its authority? What meanings does the past retain, or what new ones can it acquire? My discussion so far has primarily considered views of the past that might be termed negative revisions, insofar as they challenge its traditional prestige. I would now like to consider more positive revisions—that is, new conceptions of the past that accompany these changes.

The first such revision, which I call “elapsed time,” is perhaps nothing other than a different way of looking at Euripides’ formal prologues. It seems fair to say that the prologue speech, in the process of exhausting the past, adopts a specifically linear and irreversible scheme. In Aeschylus or Sophocles the past may be resuscitated to become an important player in the action, but in Euripides time past is finished, spent.¹⁷

A prime example would be the past that Andromache, at the beginning of her play, describes as gone.

From Asian land, from the city of Thebe,
with the golden splendor of wedding gifts
I came to Priam’s lordly home to be
Hector’s wife and give him children.
It used to be Andromache was envied,
but now the most unfortunate of all...
who saw my husband Hector killed
by Achilles, and the son I bore him,
Astyanax, thrown from the tall towers
when the Greeks took Troy.
And I, respected for my free birth and
family, came to Greece a slave,
chosen from the plunder of Troy
to be a war prize for Neoptolemus.
1–15)

(Andromache

The promise of her splendid wedding, her stature as Hector's wife, and her dignity and freedom are all gone with the sack of Troy, never to be recovered. The past is an extinguished present, a time that used to hold splendor, respect, and freedom, but no longer does. Along with these prized qualities have gone the uncertainty and openness of the present.

As the nurse in *Medea* laments, events in the past have attained a fixity and necessity unknown in the present. In trying to describe Medea's sad situation here in Corinth, the nurse goes not just back to the Argo but all the way back to the pine tree on Mount Pelion.

If only the ship Argo had never flown
to the land of Colchis through the blue Symplegades;
and the cut pine tree had never fallen
in the glades of Pelion, or given oars to the hands
of valiant men who for Pelias pursued
the Golden Fleece. Then my lady Medea
would not have sailed for the towers of Iolcus,
struck in her heart with love for Jason;
nor would she have persuaded the daughters of Pelias
to kill their father, and now be living here
in Corinth with her husband and children... . (1-11)

As the Argo flew between the crashing rocks, the future of the ship and its heroes could not be known; as the pine tree fell in the forests of Thessaly, its fabled future could not be imagined. But once the tree falls, once the ship flies, nothing can be altered. Unfortunately for the nurse, the clock cannot be turned back to undo Medea's passion for Jason or his betrayal of her. Because they cannot be undone, her passion and his betrayal must have their terrible (if yet uncertain) consequences.

With elapsed time, not only does splendor fade, but so does the capacity for change. This point is underscored in the farmer's prologue speech in *Electra*. What has happened cannot be undone, but at the time when they occurred, it was possible for events to have taken a different course. After telling of the first mustering of ships before the Trojan War, the Greek victory at Troy, Agamemnon's return, and his murder by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (1-10), the farmer continues:

As for the boy Orestes and the female child Electra,
their father's old tutor carried the former off
when he was about to die at Aegisthus's hand
and gave him to Strophius to raise in Phocis.
But Electra remained in her father's house
.....
and when it happened that Aegisthus, afraid

that she would secretly bear some nobleman a son,
decided to kill her, then savage though she is
her mother saved her from Aegisthus's hand. (15–28)

Orestes was on the point of being murdered by Aegisthus when an old servant carried him off to refuge in exile. Aegisthus had already decided to kill Electra when Clytemnestra, with surprising compassion, spared her. Electra's present hatred toward Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and her impatience for Orestes' return follow, as the farmer tells us, from the murder of Agamemnon and from Electra's forced marriage beneath her station. But events as they took place were truly undetermined: Orestes might or might not have been killed, and so too might Electra. Those alternatives and the pregnant promise they contain live only in the present. Once time has elapsed, that potential is gone. Past events no longer have the promise and uncertainty of the present.

If the past is reimagined as a present that has elapsed, the present also must pass, and the now that is alive with feelings and possibilities will soon be fixed. As a result, the dramatic present has a privileged position in Euripidean drama, but that privilege is not absolute; it carries with it an awareness that the passage of time does not stop and that the present will and must give way to new events and situations. Euripides is therefore just as careful at play's end to remind us that the present will elapse as he is at play's beginning to set the past behind us. For Aeschylus and Sophocles, the end of the play represents the end of meaningful action; there is a future, but it is largely irrelevant to the completed drama.¹⁸ Euripides, however, makes it clear that time continues to unfold, and unlike his predecessors,¹⁹ he regularly concludes with a postscript detailing events to come. At the end of *Medea*, the protagonist briefly announces that she will bury the children at Hera's temple and will go to Athens to live with Aegeus, then she prophesies concerning Jason's death (1378–88). *Electra* ends with a much fuller narrative by Castor to Orestes of events to follow.

So much for you. As for this corpse of Aegisthus,
the citizens of Argos will cover it with a tomb.
And your mother: Menelaus, arriving just now
at Nauplion, after he seized the land of Troy—
he and Helen will bury her. For Helen has arrived
from the house of Proteus, from Egypt: she never went
to Troy, but Zeus sent Helen's image to Ilion
to bring about the strife and slaughter of mankind.
Let Pylades take the young woman [Electra] as his wife
and travel home to the land of Achaia,
and let him settle your so-called brother-in-law
in Phocian land and load him down with wealth. (1276–87)

The burials of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and the marriage of Pylades to Electra are bound up with other stories—the return of Menelaus, the phantom Helen, and the good fortune of the farmer. These narrative epilogues raise interesting questions of closure: do they serve to tie up loose ends, or do they remind the spectator that there is more to come? More important for our purpose here is that they place the dramatic present in a larger continuum, reminding us that the present will also be eclipsed.²⁰

Manipulating the Past

Apart from the brief concluding intrusion of the sense that “this too shall pass,” the plays of Euripides concentrate on the present. This is especially evident in their use of the dramatic past. Recollection of the past, rather than contributing to a larger perspective, lets characters appropriate the past to present ends. One typical strategy is to “color” the past. Thus Andromache, after her narrative prologue, recapitulates the past in her prelude to the parodos (*Andromache* 103–16). This elegiac passage not only adds emotional intensity but constitutes an interpretive act. By casting the fall of Troy as a lament, Andromache also casts herself as victim and thus attempts to enlist support for her position against Hermione. A similar purpose is served by Hecuba’s lament near the beginning of *Trojan Women* (122–52); this lyric recapitulation of the fall of Troy enlists sympathy for the victims of Greek success. Another common strategy is for characters within the play to interpret the past in conflicting ways. Tyndareus and Orestes, for example, reinterpret the same event, Orestes’ murder of his mother, first as an inexcusable act of vigilante justice and then as a noble act of piety and patriotism (*Orestes* 491–604).

Two characters may also remember the past differently. In their debate in *Trojan Women*, Hecuba and Helen give very different accounts of Helen’s abduction as they try to persuade Menelaus to kill or spare his wife (914–1032).²¹ Helen describes Hecuba’s role in rearing Paris, the latter’s role in judging the three goddesses, Aphrodite’s role in compelling her to follow Paris, and her own attempts to escape from Troy. Hecuba meanwhile rejects the story of the judgment, describing Helen’s lust for Paris and her choice of remaining with the Trojan prince over suicide or escape from the city. A similar episode in Homer highlights the degree of manipulation in Euripides. In the *Odyssey*, Helen and Menelaus describe two of Odysseus’s exploits at Troy and, in the process, suggest contrasting accounts of Helen’s own role. Helen tells Telemachus how she recognized Odysseus on his spying mission inside the city and helped

him escape to safety (4.242–64), while Menelaus tells how she called out to the Greeks hiding in the wooden horse and almost betrayed their presence (4.271–89). Both episodes demonstrate Odysseus's resourcefulness, but while one also implies Helen's loyalty to the Greeks, the other insinuates her duplicity. The reader is thus left with the sense that Helen is "unknowable," since there is no easy way to decide which episode is more in keeping with her true character.²² This conflict between tendentious accounts of the past goes one step further in *Trojan Women*, where the reader is confronted with incompatible accounts of the same events. Either Helen made constant attempts to escape from Troy and had to be held back by force as she claims (952–60), or she favored whichever side was winning and refused Hecuba's offer to smuggle her from the city as Hecuba reports (1002–21). Homer's sly discrepancy between husband and wife is thus amplified to an epistemological problem: at least one of Euripides' characters is fabricating the past.²³

Perhaps the most interesting kind of manipulation involves pulling a rabbit from the hat. Whereas it is part of a poet's stock-in-trade to alter mythical plots in subtle or surprising ways, what I have in mind here is what happens when a character within the plot introduces a surprising account of the dramatic past. In *Andromache*, for example, the story of intrigue between the captured Andromache and the noble but barren Hermione is presumably Euripides' own invention and is outlined for spectators in Andromache's prologue speech. Then halfway through the play, when Hermione's scheme has been foiled and she tries to commit suicide, Orestes suddenly appears and helps her. In terms of stage action, this is a typically Euripidean twist (I discuss some examples later under "Time Present"). In terms of the larger story, however, Orestes introduces a different kind of twist, manipulating the past to justify his entrance. Having first used a conventional pretext (according to lines 885–86, he was passing by on his way to the oracle), he now announces that he has come to reclaim Hermione, because Menelaus first engaged her to him but later gave her to Neoptolemus as a bribe to gain support (959–81). This apparently novel account of the past was not revealed in the prologue, and the belated use of it here reinforces both the unexpected arrival of Orestes and his own rather devious character.²⁴ In *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Clytemnestra begins her final confrontation with her husband with a novel and shocking account of how Agamemnon married her by force, killing her husband Tantalus and tearing her baby child from her breast (1146–56). The revelation says as much about Clytemnestra as about Agamemnon. The content of her accusation reveals the king as ruthless and violent throughout his career, yet her method of

confronting him with a story never before heard suggests the hidden depths of her anger, feelings so powerful they cannot be swayed by the pleas of Iphigenia (1454, 1456) and will drive her to murder.²⁵ Finally, in *Hecuba*, the emotional scene in which Polyxena is taken from her mother to be killed on Achilles' tomb is accentuated when the playwright pulls another rabbit from the hat. Odysseus has come to take the daughter away and, under questioning from Hecuba, admits that on a spying mission into Troy he was recognized by Helen and would have been killed except that he pleaded with Hecuba for his life (239–50). The Greek hero nevertheless refuses to spare the life of Polyxena, claiming that he owes his life to the mother and not the daughter (301–2). The apocryphal story of Hecuba once saving Odysseus's life magnifies her righteous indignation at those who abuse her trust and prepares for her terrible revenge against the even more perfidious Polymestor.

In demystifying the past and using it for present ends, Euripidean characters situate themselves squarely in the dramatic present. Yet the present cannot be divorced from the past. As the prologues make clear, the past gave rise to the present and—as apocryphal recollections make clear—did so in often surprising ways. Euripidean characters do not live in an existential present with no knowledge or memory of the past, as does Roquentin, the protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausée*. Roquentin discovered that the present “was what exists, and all that was not present did not exist”; he was able to claim: “The past did not exist. Not at all. Not in things, not even in my thoughts.”²⁶ In using the past, the characters in Euripides may end up revising or refashioning it, but they neither alter it at will nor deny its existence. Hecuba and Helen may have disparate memories of the same events, but there is no suggestion that the past is little more than a construct of memory in a postmodern sense. In turning from the past to the present and in replacing its authority with the experience of the present, Euripides does not, like Gorgias, deny that past and future are knowable; he instead, like Antiphon, revises their significance, regarding past and future as meaningful only in relation to human concerns in the dramatic present. As a further example of Euripides' particular orientation, I shall conclude this section on time past by considering the use he makes of memory in *Heracles*.

Memory and Identity

Heracles begins with a complex account of the dramatic past by the protagonist's father, Amphytrion. He describes his own past in Argos, that of Megara in Thebes, Megara's marriage to Heracles,

Amphitryon's murder of Alcmena's father, Heracles' labors to appease Hera and recover Argos, and the rise to power of Lycus, who now threatens the family of Heracles (1–50). This narrative clearly distinguishes between the elapsed past and the uncertain present, in which Heracles may or may not return from Hades and in which Lycus may or may not make good his threat to kill the remaining members of Heracles' family. Whereas the past cannot be changed, there are two important ways in which it may be revisited: through explaining Heracles' labors and through questioning his identity.

In the prologue, Amphitryon does not dwell on Heracles' famous exploits but concentrates instead on his reasons for performing them, as well as his apparent failure to complete the last one.

He left Thebes, where I had settled,
left Megara and her family, and my son
set out to live in the Cyclopean walls
of Argos, which I fled when I killed
Electryon. Wanting to ease my misfortunes
and live in our homeland, he paid
Eurystheus a high price for return—
to pacify the earth, mastered either by
the goads of Hera or by necessity.
He completed all the other labors
and finally went to Hades through the jaws
of Taenarus to bring up to light
the three-bodied dog. He has not returned. (13–25)

The fact that the past cannot be undone is nowhere more true than in the famous labors of Heracles. Yet the past can always be revisited and revised in memory. Why exactly did Heracles undertake these labors? Amphitryon prefers to think he did so to allow his family to return to Argos, but he admits there may have been other reasons—the more familiar story of Hera's jealousy, for instance (20–21), or perhaps some unspecified necessity (21). The process of reinterpreting these past exploits is a central concern of the play. In Lycus's confrontation with Megara and Amphitryon, the tyrant justifies his seizure of power by offering a very different recollection of the hero's deeds.

What proud deeds did your husband perform
by killing a marsh hydra or the wild beast
of Nemea, since he caught them in traps,
claiming he throttled them in his arms?
Are these your claims? Because of this
the sons of Heracles should not die?
A zero in courage, he became famous
battling animals, no strength for anything else
since he never carried a shield in his left hand

or came near a spear, but holding a bow—
that coward's weapon—stood ready to run.
The bow is no test of a man's courage,
but one who stands and looks unflinching
at the spear's swift furrow and holds his rank.

(151–64)

As Lycus remembers the past, Heracles' labors involved nothing more than trapping animals, and his conquest of nature was nothing more than a cowardly pretext to avoid the hardships of battle.

These competing accounts are possible because Heracles, as critics have noted, is an especially ambiguous hero,²⁷ and through the memories of Lycus and Amphitryon, Euripides presents the accounts as mutually exclusive. How do we decide, then, between differing views of the past? As Amphitryon acknowledges, all he can do is use λόγοι, "language" or "argument," to try and show that Lycus is mistaken (171–73). He therefore gives his own account of the past, beginning with another episode, the Battle of Gods and Giants.

I call on Zeus's thunderbolt and the
chariot he rode, piercing with arrows
the bodies of earthborn giants,
celebrating with the gods his victory song!
Go to Pholoe, you cowardly king,
and ask the centaurs, those four-legged travesties,
what man they judge bravest
if not my son, whom you call a fake.
But if you ask Dirphys, the land that raised you,
it won't praise you; nowhere have you
done anything good your homeland can point to.
You criticize the archer's equipment, that
wise invention. Listen and learn.
The armored soldier is a slave of his weapons.
If he shares formation with lesser men,
he dies from his neighbor's cowardice;
he has one defense and cannot save
his body from death when he breaks his spear.
But he whose hands can aim the bow,
best of all, after loosing countless arrows
has more to save himself from death
and then foils his enemies from afar,
wounding with weapons they cannot see.

(177–99)

Heracles' exploits are now magnified beyond the traditional labors and the conquest of nature to the establishment of cosmological order. The triumph of the Olympians over the giants depended on Heracles, who shared the chariot of Zeus as a partner and equal of the supreme god. The triumph of human values required his defeat of the race of centaurs, whose physical monstrosity and violent threat to order (ὕβρισμα, 181) now acknowledge this man's supremacy. Amphitryon

argues that if one could interrogate the past, if one could question the thunderbolt of Zeus and the centaurs of Pholoe, the greatness of Heracles would be beyond dispute. As it is, words must contend with words, and Amphitryon praises as a wise and shrewd invention the very same bow Lycus branded as a coward's weapon. The result of these meditations on the past is to throw into doubt the meaning of Heracles' exploits.²⁸ The prologue speech begins this process by juxtaposing competing explanations for why Heracles performed the labors, at the same time failing to provide a means of choosing among the explanations. The debate between Lycus and Amphitryon early on in the play takes this process further, giving two completely different accounts of both the exploits and the hero who performed them. Were these exploits mere trapping and the hero only a draft dodger? Or were they exploits of cosmological significance and their agent a shrewd inventor? The revisions on both sides make it impossible to decide.

By the end of the scene, it has become clear that Heracles will not return and that Lycus will prevail. Megara and Amphitryon prepare themselves and the children for death, while the chorus reflects on this situation with another retelling of Heracles' labors. This is the fullest and most detailed account of the labors; it is also a largely traditional account, celebrating the familiar Twelve Labors from the Nemean Lion to the capture of Cerberus, the crucial difference being that Heracles fails here in the last labor. He does not return from Hades and so must be presumed dead. The song celebrating the hero's greatness begins as a radical revision, a dirge at his death.

Phoebus makes lament resound
after a song of good fortune,
striking with golden pick
his sweet-voiced lyre.
Let me celebrate the one
who went to the gloom of the dead—
whether I call him son of Zeus
or son of Amphitryon—
offering in praise a crown for his labors. (348–56)

The ode ends, as it began, in lamentation.

He achieved the happy honor
of other tasks and sailed to
sad Hades, the end of his labors,
where the wretched man reaches
the end of his life, and did not come back.
The house is empty of friends,
and Charon's oar waits
for his children, their lives a godless

unjust road of no return.
The house looks for the help
of you who are gone.

(425–35)

The chorus's memory of Heracles' labors is not tendentious as are the versions of Lycus and Amphytrion; nevertheless, it recasts the labors as emblems not of superhuman stature but of common mortality.

The play's final version of the past is Heracles' own. After the play's remarkable reversals, in which Heracles first returns from Hades to rescue his family and kill Lycus, then is driven mad and kills his wife and children, he comes to his senses and decides to commit suicide. Theseus arrives and encourages the hero to live, but Heracles supports his decision by recollecting his own past.

Hear how my words compete with
your advice. I will reveal to you that
life is not and was not worth living.
First, I was born from a man who killed
my mother's father and then married my
mother Alcmene while stained with crime.

When a family's foundation is not set
right, its descendants will suffer.

And Zeus, whoever Zeus is, fathered me
as Hera's enemy (don't fret, old man,
I consider you, not Zeus, my father):
while I was still nursing, Zeus's wife
placed in my cradle gorgon-faced
snakes to slither and kill me.

And when I put on this strong belt
of muscle—why tell the labors I endured?

What lions, what three-bodied Typhons,
what giants and four-legged armies
of centaurs I did away with!

I killed the Hydra, that beast covered with heads
all growing back, and completed countless
flocks of labors and reached the dead
to convey above, at Eurystheus's command,
the three-headed dog guarding Hades.

Finally I did this terrible deed, killing my
children and crowning the house with evil.

(1255–80)

Heracles the son of Zeus remembers himself instead as the son of a murderer and the object of Hera's hate. Heracles the victorious remembers himself as a victim, enduring snakes and monsters—not a performer of stellar deeds, but a taxed survivor of ten thousand trials (1275–76). The final hideous "labor" of killing his children requires that we remember his entire career differently. Thus what the chorus has celebrated in lament lives in the hero's memory only as unrelieved suffering.

These shifting memories of the past construct new identities for the hero. To Lycus he is a coward, to Amphitryon someone shrewd and superhuman, to the chorus an accomplished mortal, and to himself a suffering victim. This refashioning of Heracles' identity primarily arises from these different memories of the hero's exploits. But it also results from shifting memories of his parentage.²⁹ Many of these accompany the passages already quoted. When, in the prologue, Amphitryon opens the question of why Heracles undertook his labors, he also opens the question of his parentage: Amphitryon is Heracles' father (2–3), but, as everyone knows, Amphitryon shared his wife with Zeus (1). When Lycus challenges Heracles' bravery, he also challenges the empty boast that Zeus was his father (148–49), and Amphitryon in his rejoinder claims that Zeus will uphold his role as father (170–71). The chorus begins its ambivalent song of praise and lament, uncertain whether Zeus or Amphitryon is Heracles' father (353–54, quoted earlier). Heracles, in his own revision, acknowledges Zeus as his father, only to reject the god for Amphitryon (1263–65, quoted earlier). We might therefore reasonably say that Euripides' *Heracles* is centrally concerned with interrogating heroic stature. In this play, the past is remembered neither as an end in itself nor as a source of some authority; rather, memory of the past is that slippery site on which the hero's identity is erected.

The startling result is that the hero's fame, or *kleos*, is time-dependent and so always open to renegotiation. Different people view Heracles in different ways, some as a hero, some not. His return from Hades and defeat of Lycus prompt the chorus to celebrate him as victor, while the threat to his family and his subsequent murder of them cause him to renounce the title. Heracles' uncertain identity and fame are underscored by the finale, in which the erstwhile hero departs to an unknown future in Athens.³⁰ This contrasts strikingly with the traditional notion of the hero's *kleos* as transcending time, as an eternal fame that is bought very dearly—as Achilles learns in the *Iliad*—in a transaction involving not just the individual but the whole community of his peers.

TIME PRESENT

If in Euripides the past is an elapsed present and the future is a present not yet realized, the burden of meaning and interest lies squarely in the dramatic present. This burden involves what we might call, following Bakhtin, “presentness”³¹—that is, a sense of the present as the crucial site at which action takes place and choices are made. Rather than emphasize the influence of the past or offer a synoptic

view of past, present, and future, Euripides tends to focus on the unfolding of events as they transpire. Several features of Euripidean drama contribute to this sense of presentness; for convenience's sake, I shall call them "incident," "accident," and "undecidedness." By "incident" I mean the sheer number of events, by "accident" the lack of necessary causation among them, and by "undecidedness" a fluidity of character. As I discuss each of these features, it will emerge that all are marked by the absence of a controlling perspective that orders events by selecting and arranging them. In other words, Euripides' focus on the present brings us closer to unmediated experience.

Incident

In the context of Euripidean tragedy, I mean by "incident" the busyness of the plot, the accumulation of things happening onstage that heightens a sense of the present as a site of action. As Jasper Griffin notes in a different context, in Euripides "events rain in upon the characters faster and faster; unexpectedness and complications multiply, extreme situations succeed one another, men and women are at their mercy."³² By contrast, Aeschylus's plays are notorious for their lack of incident.³³

In Aeschylus's *Persians*, for example, the queen enters to report her fears, the messenger enters to report the defeat at Salamis, the ghost of Darius appears to rebuke Xerxes' ambition, and Xerxes himself appears to lament his defeat. There is profound reflection on human aspirations and limitations, a stirring report of the sea battle, and emotional lament in lyrics, but nothing "happens," so to speak, onstage.³⁴ In *Agamemnon*, there are two events: the king returns from Troy, and he is killed by Clytemnestra. These are powerfully charged by the watchman's forebodings, the recollections of the chorus, Agamemnon's symbolic entrance on the tapestries, and Cassandra's premonition of disaster, but the action itself is remarkably spare. The plays that follow are progressively busier. In *Libation Bearers*, Orestes' return and reunion with Electra are followed by two murders, and the whole sequence is colored by the report of Clytemnestra's dream and the invocation of Agamemnon; *Eumenides* presents a change of setting, two supplication scenes, and a trial with a "second chorus" of jurors; yet neither drama approaches the busyness of most Euripidean plays. Sophocles gives more scope to incident in his dramas. *Oedipus the King* involves basically two events: the altercation between Oedipus and Teiresias and the offstage climax in which Jocasta commits suicide and Oedipus blinds himself. The remainder of the play consists of reports from various messengers as well as from the characters

themselves, which allow Oedipus to gradually piece together his past. The plot of *Oedipus at Colonus*, however, is noticeably busier. After arriving at Colonus with Antigone, Oedipus must first persuade the inhabitants to let him stay; then, after Ismene's report of Creon's plans, he must win from Theseus a promise of protection. The action builds with the entrance of Creon himself, who attempts to carry off Oedipus and his daughters, only to be halted, first by Theseus and then by the entrance of Polyneices, who pleads for his father's blessing and receives curses instead. The climax is the mysterious offstage death of Oedipus. The accumulation of incident in this play, unlike the usual pattern in Euripides, is almost entirely negative: Oedipus arrives at Colonus and dies there; the other stage events—even the initial outcry of the chorus, warning him to keep away from the sacred grove—are failed attempts to obstruct or interfere with this outcome. In other words, the busyness is the accumulation of nonevents.

Euripides tends to accumulate incidents that contribute actively to the plot's outcome. After the prologue of *Hippolytus*, the nurse extracts from Phaedra her passion for Hippolytus; Phaedra decides to commit suicide; the nurse persuades her to wait and then reveals her secret to Hippolytus; Hippolytus abuses his stepmother, and she commits suicide, leaving a letter incriminating him; Theseus then returns and, learning what has happened, curses his son. The offstage climax is the fatal trampling of Hippolytus by his horses. Such busyness is typical of Euripides and only increases in later plays, such as *Iphigenia among the Taurians* or *Orestes*. The latter is particularly interesting in that the entire plot elaborates or makes busy what is essentially a nonevent in Aeschylus. According to Aeschylus, after Orestes kills his mother, he is pursued by the Furies, fleeing first to Delphi and then to Athens, where he stands trial. *Orestes* tells a story of what happens after he kills his mother and before he goes into exile: while Orestes sleeps, Helen enters and asks Electra to make an offering at Clytemnestra's tomb, but Electra persuades her to send Hermione; Orestes wakes up in a fit of madness; Menelaus enters, and just as Orestes asks for his help, Tyndareus arrives and abuses him; despite Orestes' appeals, Tyndareus leaves vowing to punish him, and Menelaus leaves without promising help; Pylades enters, then leaves with Orestes to make an appeal to the assembly; Electra enters and learns from a messenger that they have failed; when they return from the assembly, they decide on suicide until Electra persuades them to murder Helen and capture Hermione; a Phrygian slave describes the apparent success of the former scheme, and when Menelaus returns, Orestes appears on the roof holding his daughter hostage. Menelaus is about to storm the

palace, and Orestes is about to kill Hermione, when Apollo appears, commands them to stop, and explains that Helen escaped. This is a narrative tour de force: it crams an overwhelming amount of action into a moment that for Aeschylus contains nothing worth reporting.

Even *Trojan Women*, often considered a lyric lament in which nothing happens,³⁵ is full of incident. The play begins immediately after the fall of Troy, and by the time it ends, nothing significant seems to have happened; although the sense of loss has been profoundly deepened, the general situation remains the same. Yet Euripides achieves emotional intensity precisely through such busyness of action. As the play begins, Athena and Poseidon plot to destroy the Greek fleet as it returns from Troy; Hecuba enters, and Talthybius tells her to which Greeks the women have been assigned; Cassandra enters, foretells the murder of Agamemnon and the wanderings of Odysseus, and is carried off; Andromache enters in despair, and when Hecuba advises her to hope, Talthybius comes to carry off and kill her infant son Astyanax; when Menelaus passes by, promising to kill Helen, Hecuba insists on an emotional debate with Helen, which apparently confirms Menelaus's decision to kill her; finally, Talthybius enters with the body of Astyanax, the women lament, and all depart for Greece. Just as in *Persians*, the protagonists have already been defeated when the play begins. Yet whereas Aeschylus uses a minimal amount of incident to explore the moral implications of what has happened, Euripides uses a maximum amount of incident to make the sense of loss and suffering as vivid and "present" as possible.

Accident

By referring to "accident" in Euripides' plays, I mean the unexpectedness of the action or the capacity of events to cause surprise.³⁶ There is nothing like this in the plays of Aeschylus, who uses shock and surprise sparingly, reserving them for descriptive purposes. His *Eumenides* begins, for example, with a speech by the priestess at Delphi on the venerable authority of the oracle. She then enters the temple, only to emerge again suddenly on all fours, shocked and repulsed at what she saw inside. The audience is also shocked, but not at an unexpected happening. This sudden twist conveys the horror of the Furies and their appearance and not surprise at their presence, since the preceding play in the *Oresteia* trilogy ended with a promise that Apollo would free Orestes from the Furies (*Libation Bearers* 1059–60). This shock is replayed in the parodos of *Eumenides*, as the entrance of the hideous Furies reportedly caused women in the

audience to miscarry.³⁷ Dramatic surprise thus conveys the depth of moral horror, not the unexpectedness of events. The same is true of another surprising entrance, that of Darius's ghost in *Persians*. This is not an unexpected event in the plot, since the queen spent the preceding scene praying for him to appear (619–80). The surprise is that he appears onstage (unlike the unseen presence of Agamemnon in *Libation Bearers*, who answers the summons of Orestes and Electra by strengthening their resolve). The startling presence of the dead king's shade gives authority to his rebuke of Xerxes and to his prophecy of further defeat at Plataea; it does not suggest that the course of events is either surprising or unexpected.

Sophocles, unlike Aeschylus, makes regular use of surprise, although it might be more accurate to speak of coincidental timing than of unexpected outcome. In *Oedipus the King*, when the priest recommends consulting the gods (42–43), Oedipus answers that he has already sent Creon to Delphi (69–72), then Creon enters a few lines later; when the chorus recommends an interview with Teiresias (283–86), Oedipus replies that he has already sent for him (287–89), at which the prophet promptly appears. It is no coincidence that Oedipus has already acted: this simply demonstrates his alacrity. In each case, what was surprising is not the action itself—both Creon and Teiresias were expected—but the precise timing of their entrances. Such timing is common in Sophocles. For example, in *Antigone*, Creon no sooner announces his injunction against burying Polyneices than a messenger arrives, reporting the first mysterious burial (223), and Creon no sooner regrets condemning Haemon than a messenger arrives reporting his death (1155). Again, in each case the timing of the action is key: Antigone has already promised to bury Polyneices (43–46, 80–81),³⁸ and Haemon has already threatened to die with Antigone (751, 763–64). To complicate matters further, coincidental timing in *Oedipus the King* is accompanied by coincidental identity. The messenger who comes to report the death of Polybus happens also to be the man who received the infant near Mount Cithaeron, and the herdsman who was sole witness to Laius's murder also happens to be the man who exposed his infant son. While the combinations of roles are surprising, the roles themselves are not. As Oedipus's interrogation of the Corinthian messenger makes clear, he would leave no stone unturned in his quest for the truth. It is not surprising, then, that Oedipus would track down all the relevant witnesses; the surprise is, rather, that two witnesses play the parts of four. Isolated events, in other words, do not surprise; what is surprising in Sophocles is the coincidence of events that initially seemed independent.

In Euripides' plays, however, events themselves are frequently

surprising.³⁹ In *Medea*, the entrance of Aegeus on his way back from Delphi is entirely unexpected.⁴⁰ Medea knew that if escape from Corinth was not possible, she would have to make other plans (389–94), but nothing prepares her or the audience for the king's arrival. In *Heracles*, the dramatic surprise is doubled. Megara and Amphitryon have concluded that Heracles must be dead and so have prepared themselves to die at the hands of Lycus, when the hero unexpectedly returns from Hades. Shortly afterward, Heracles has rescued his family and has killed the tyrant, when Iris and Lyssa suddenly enter and drive him mad. This capacity of events to cause surprise is in fact pervasive in Euripides, especially in the so-called intrigue plays.⁴¹ The plot of *Helen*, for instance, relies heavily on accident—in the unexpected entrance of Theonoe just as Helen and Menelaus decide to commit suicide and in the seer's surprising decision to help the couple escape from her brother Theoclymenus. Their scheme is virtually complete when the unexpected resistance of a bull almost scuttles it. No sooner has their escape been announced to Theoclymenus than the king unexpectedly attempts to kill his sister, a servant intercepts him, and Castor suddenly enters above and tells them to stop.

This potential for surprise—the fact that events in the dramatic present are unpredictable—is made even more explicit in *Ion*. Its plot, like that of *Helen*, relies on accident, from the unexpected vehemence of the old servant who goads Creusa to revenge to the sudden entrance of the priestess as Ion is about to kill his mother. Whereas in *Oedipus* we recognize in hindsight that events are not accidental, that attempts to evade the implications of Apollo's oracles somehow help to fulfill them, the opposite is true in *Ion*. This play begins with Hermes' detailed exposition both of what Apollo will do and of how he will do it. The abandoned child, unlike Oedipus, will be reunited with his mother and will assume his rightful place as heir to the throne; and the god will accomplish this by pretending that Ion is the son of Xuthus, deceiving Creusa until Ion is installed in Athens, and keeping his own rape of Creusa a secret (69–73).⁴² Yet the emotional center of the play is Creusa's revelation—to Ion, the chorus, and the old servant—of how Apollo sexually assaulted her, and the engine of the plot is Creusa's discovery that Xuthus has been given a son and then that Ion is hers and not Xuthus's. This double or triple failure by the god underlines the capacity of events to surprise. His goal will be salvaged with the help of Athena's entrance on the machine, but the means to this end show just how unpredictable events can be.⁴³

Such novelty can be conveyed in another way. As we have seen, what does happen may be surprising or unexpected. Conversely, what is expected may not happen after all. The device of leading the plot

down a certain course only to reveal belatedly that this was a blind alley is typically Euripidean. There is, of course, some suspense and uncertainty in any plot,⁴⁴ and as Geoffrey Arnott has shown, Euripides enjoys creating small surprises and false leads that keep the spectators on their toes.⁴⁵ The blind alley runs deeper and must be more carefully constructed. In the early scenes of *Heracles*, for example, the playwright goes to great lengths to suggest that Megara, Amphitryon, and Heracles' children will be killed by Lycus. First, Megara attempts to persuade Amphitryon that the time for hope is past, since the hero has been gone so long to Hades. Then Lycus makes clear that he has the will and the power to kill them. Finally, the members of Heracles' family bow to necessity by leaving the protection of the altar and announcing that they are prepared to die. The suggestion that Lycus will succeed is reinforced by the characters' unprecedented abandonment of the altar and by the theatrical gesture in which they leave the stage and then return dressed for death.⁴⁶

By contrast, in Aeschylus there are no blind alleys, and in Sophocles there is only one,⁴⁷ when in *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus regrets deceiving Philoctetes and returns Heracles' bow to him; when Philoctetes also demands that he honor his promise to return with him to Greece, Neoptolemus reluctantly agrees, thus turning the drama in a new direction. Only after the deified Heracles enters and commands them both to take the bow to Troy does the plot abruptly abandon this untraditional course. The effect of this device is, in general, to heighten the authority of the present moment, in which action is not yet determined and various outcomes are possible; in Sophocles, it helps, in particular, to suggest the not-yet-formed character of Neoptolemus as he struggles to define who he is.⁴⁸

In Euripides the device is much more common and tends instead to explore the indeterminacy of human action. Like *Heracles*, *Orestes* begins with a character apparently about to die, this time because of the Furies. In the prologue, Electra calls her sleeping brother a corpse because he is so near death (83–85), and when the chorus enters, the expectation that he will die mounts. Electra says he is barely alive, that the slightest disturbance will kill him (155–58), and when she says he is about to die, the chorus readily agrees (“that is clearly his doom,” 190). Electra then explains that Apollo has killed them to avenge the matricide (191–93). In her final lament, she includes herself, Orestes, and Agamemnon as the victims of Clytemnestra, singing that she, too, is like a corpse and grieving that her brother “is among the dead, and most of my life has perished in grief” (201–5).⁴⁹ Only now that Orestes' death seems certain does he awake. This false expectation of death has many variations. In *Helen*, Menelaus and

Helen plan to die together, going so far as to seal the suicide pact with a handshake (838–39), when Theonoe suddenly interrupts them. Later in *Orestes*, Orestes, Pylades, and Electra contrive a more elaborate triple-suicide pact that is unexpectedly interrupted when Pylades suggests that since they are going to die, they should make Menelaus suffer as well (1098–99). In *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, when Iphigenia offers to let Pylades live if he will take a letter to Argos, the death of Orestes seems assured. Orestes accepts her exchange, and although Pylades wants to die instead, Orestes insists and Pylades relents; only after Iphigenia’s lengthy instructions reveal her own identity to Orestes is the blind alley abandoned. The false expectation of death heightens suspense but cannot on that account be dismissed as a dramatist’s trick. Suspense of this sort—uncertainty or anxiety as real alternatives loom—is a Euripidean novelty that serves, among other things, to draw attention to present possibilities.

Even more striking are the false expectations generated toward the end of a play. As *Children of Heracles* ends, Alcmena is about to murder the captured Eurystheus and thereby pollute the city that saved her, a troubling outcome only averted by that “most unexpected reversal” in which Eurystheus accepts death and offers protection to Athens.⁵⁰ New directions for the plot are more commonly closed off not by a human character but by a *deus ex machina*. At the end of *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, the Greeks are about to be captured, and Thoas is on his way to kill them, when Athena enters to ensure their escape. Theoclymenus is about to murder his sister and the servant who stands in his way at the end of *Helen*, when Castor appears. Likewise in *Ion*, Ion is determined to interrogate Apollo and demand an explanation for his lies and deceptions, when Athena arrives and tells him to stop. The most spectacular example of an unexpected reversal is in *Orestes*. Orestes is about to murder Hermione and burn down the palace, and Menelaus is about to storm the palace and kill the conspirators, when Apollo suddenly enters and sets events on a more peaceful and familiar course. Perhaps the most instructive example, however, can be found in *Phoenician Women*. In this case, the play ends not with one course abruptly altered but with two conflicting paths that cannot both be followed.⁵¹ Creon orders Oedipus into exile, and his daughter Antigone promises to go with him. But Creon also orders that Polyneices be denied burial, and Antigone makes a second promise to remain and defy him. One of these options must be a blind alley, but the play fails to indicate which. The capacity of the present to surprise and to lead in unexpected directions is thus represented most directly by real and competing possibilities for the future course of events. As this review suggests,

credible false leads in the plot are not easily managed, and one of the more effective devices is also the most artificial—the *deus ex machina* who prohibits a certain course of events. More subtle false leads involve not an actual course of events but a character’s potential to follow more than one path.

Undecidedness

By referring to “undecidedness” in Euripidean tragedy, I mean the capacity of characters to cause surprise, to act in ways that might not have been anticipated. This is not the same as change of mind, since, as we shall see later, a change of mind may be entirely expected, while an unexpected action or decision need not involve a change of mind. I am here interested in the ability of dramatic characters to act in unexpected ways, thus corresponding to what I have already described as “accident,” or the ability of dramatic plots to take unexpected turns. Neither effect is entirely new. Just as a plot can be neither credible nor interesting without the listener’s belief that alternative outcomes are possible, so convincing characters require the spectators’ belief that they may act in various ways. Euripides’ contribution is to take these effects further than the other tragedians, presenting characters who not only choose to change but do so unexpectedly. The most famous example of a surprising character in Euripides is Iphigenia, who changes her mind without warning in *Iphigenia at Aulis*. As Aristotle observes,⁵² her character is truly uneven or inconsistent (*ἀνόμελος*) in that the girl who pleads for her life does not seem to be the same girl who later offers to die. Precisely this capacity to surprise, rejected by Aristotle, contributes to a sense of presentness in Euripides.

While characters in Aeschylus may also change their minds, they do so without causing surprise.⁵³ The “carpet scene” in *Agamemnon*, for example, involves a distinct change of mind. When Clytemnestra asks Agamemnon to walk on tapestries, her husband at first declines (919–28) but then assents after a brief exchange. If there is one thing the preceding scenes convey, it is the commander’s capacity for error—a capacity his present change of mind clearly confirms.⁵⁴ In Aristotle’s terms, there is a necessary or probable connection between the father at Aulis (described in the *parodos*) and the husband here returning home. It does not follow that Aeschylus’s characters cannot surprise us. For instance, just as startling as Darius’s entrance in *Persians* is his severe moral judgment against his son. He proclaims that Xerxes desecrated holy shrines and statues and that for this godless arrogance he shall be punished without measure (807–15).

There is no undecidedness here: we do not see Darius speak or act in ways for which we have not been prepared. The surprise is not so much that he criticizes his son as that he renders judgment so clearly and unequivocally, cementing his authority with a prophecy of events at Plataea. Somewhat similar is the character of Prometheus (which I attribute to Aeschylus).⁵⁵ His resistance to Zeus, far from a surprise, is a premise of the drama from the very opening scene, when he is chained to the rock. What surprises us is the firmness of his resolve in standing against Ocean, Hermes, and the thunderbolts of Zeus. Aeschylean characters thus surprise us not with unanticipated actions but by revealing their qualities more fully or deeply.

Sophocles' characters in a somewhat similar way intrigue us by revealing their depth—the stubborn determination of Oedipus, for example, or the deep-seated hatred of Electra. The temporal sequence of events plays a more crucial role than in Aeschylus in revealing these qualities of character; as the chorus observed to Oedipus, “all-seeing time has found you out against your will” (*Oedipus the King* 1213). The spectator may indeed be surprised at how a character is “found out.” After Antigone is captured in the act of burying Polyneices, for example, Ismene unexpectedly tells Creon that she was her sister's accomplice (*Antigone* 536–37). Her statement is all the more surprising when we consider how, in the opening scene, Ismene refused to help Antigone.⁵⁶ Yet in rejecting her sister's hollow gesture, Antigone shows that Ismene has not really changed. Ismene's fear of offending Creon and her inability to stand on her own against him are now replayed in her craven dependence on her sister. “Justice will not let you do this,” Antigone answers, “since you were unwilling and I did not include you” (538–39). Ismene admits that she is thinking, as before, of her own survival: “how shall I live alone, without her?” (566). In this case, Ismene's “confession” surprises us by coming right on the heels of her sister's solitary defiance of the king. This is not quite the same as undecidedness: Ismene's weakness is wretchedly consistent, though it is revealed now when we did not expect it.⁵⁷ A more striking surprise is that of Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes*. After successfully getting the bow from Philoctetes, he suddenly returns determined to atone for his deception. Despite the protests of Odysseus, he returns the bow that he worked so hard to get. Bernard Knox argues that this is less a surprising novelty than a return to Neoptolemus's true nobility: “it is a change of mind *back* (πάλιν) to a position he should never have deserted, his reintegration in the heroic mold of his father Achilles.”⁵⁸ Yet it comes very close to the undecidedness so common in Euripides: the young man clearly

demonstrates his noble or generous impulses in the opening scenes, then yields to Odysseus and tricks Philoctetes of the bow, then regrets what he has done and returns it.

In Euripides, undecidedness is an irreducible part of human nature. I have already noted the example of Iphigenia, whose conduct involves a surprising change of mind. Equally striking, though in a different way, is the character of Medea, who at a single moment seems capable of two entirely different actions. In her final speech, Medea bids farewell to the children she has decided to kill (*Medea* 1029–39), but when she looks into their eyes, she changes her mind and decides to spare them (1040–48). The prospect of leaving her revenge incomplete makes her steel herself again for murder (1049–55), then pity for the children overwhelms her once more (1056–58), until she finally reaffirms her awful decision to kill them (1059–69).⁵⁹ There is no inconsistency of character here such as Aristotle criticized in Iphigenia—no subsequent Medea incompatible with the original. Instead, she is two different women at one time; her character is undecided. She is at this moment fully prepared to murder her own children in order to punish Jason; she is also fully prepared to renounce revenge for the sake of the children she loves.⁶⁰ What is striking here is the potential for surprise: the woman who is driven to extreme lengths by her need for revenge can surprise us by renouncing revenge for love, and the woman so deeply moved by love can surprise us by choosing revenge instead.

A capacity for surprise can also take less striking forms. For example, in *Helen*, the barbarian king Theoclymenus finds Helen has escaped and is calling all his men to pursue her (1180–83) when he catches sight of her wearing black and sympathetically asks what might be wrong (1190–92). The characteristically savage king thus surprises us with his unexpected kindness, for which we have not been prepared. In *Orestes*, Electra devotes herself to tending her sick and deranged brother, but when Orestes and Pylades find themselves condemned to death, it is the long-suffering Electra who suddenly comes up with the plan to hold Hermione hostage (1177–1203) and surprises us with her cunning and daring. In *Hippolytus*, the old nurse, shocked and horrified at Phaedra's revelation of her love for Hippolytus, leaves intending to kill herself (353–61), but she soon returns, proclaiming that second thoughts are wiser (436) and advising Phaedra to pursue the love she so vehemently denounced. The pious woman's sudden promotion of a shameful affair is both unexpected and surprising. Thus in drawing attention to the uncertainty of events as they occur, Euripides is also drawing attention to the unpredictability of human behavior.⁶¹

Incident, accident, and undecidedness are formal devices that allow the dramatist to focus more closely on events as they transpire—on action “in the midstest”⁶²—and less on a privileged perspective that tends to highlight particular events and connections among them. The uses of such perspective vary. It is of course true that every story is a retelling and every drama a reenactment, so it follows that the author selects and arranges the material in every case. The degree of ordering is on the whole greater in epic, where the gods and the narrator frequently anticipate events to come; it is considerably smaller in street theater, which relies on the involvement of a transient audience. The formal devices of Euripides reduce this ordering perspective, thus narrowing the gap between characters and audience and bringing spectators closer to the moment at which events take place. In this section of this chapter, I consider some implications of dwelling in the present, by looking first at the effects of suspense and delay on the audience and then at the portrayal of the characters’ uncertain experiences.

Suspense and Fulfillment

Greek tragedy relies almost exclusively on the traditional stories of myth for its subject matter, so the spectators necessarily have a knowledge of the plot and characters normally unavailable, say, to the readers of a modern novel. The three tragedians draw attention to the spectators’ privileged knowledge by hinting in some way at events to come, while always leaving the characters—and audience—uncertain about the exact outcome and how it will be reached. From a narratological point of view, we might ask about the delays or detours that impede progress toward a known goal and thus help to generate suspense and interest in the reader.⁶³ But what happens when the obstacle is removed or overcome? I would argue that there is not just relief that the frustration is ended but a positive sense of recognition or fulfillment as the goal acquires a revised significance. The end of a Sherlock Holmes detective story, for example, not only reveals the criminal’s name but also explains how the crime was committed and—most important—how the shrewd detective was able to solve an apparently insoluble case. In this subsection, I will consider three plays by the three tragedians that tell the same story in different ways; the outcome is the well-known revenge of Electra and Orestes against their mother Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but in achieving that outcome, each tragedian makes use of delay to different ends.⁶⁴

In *Libation Bearers*, as Orestes returns to Argos, he is promptly reunited with his sister and, before entering the palace, lays out his plan (554–78): Electra will keep quiet; he and Pylades will gain entrance by disguising themselves; once inside, Orestes will be the one to kill Aegisthus. It is indeed a simple plan, as Orestes says (554), although it is somewhat abbreviated (with no mention of bringing false news that Orestes is dead) and somewhat simpler than the actual turn of events (it turns out, for instance, that Aegisthus is away and will first have to be lured back into the house). The plot of the drama is simple as well: events largely follow the outline of the plan Orestes has proposed, and any delay arises more from pauses by the protagonists than from external obstacles to be overcome. The reunion of Orestes and Electra is a crucial beginning, but it does not lead to any real action for more than four hundred lines; instead, we learn about Clytemnestra's ominous dream and then watch the siblings pray to their dead father for assistance. Their mother's dream, like the matching hair and footprints, is an omen endorsing their plans, while the invocation of Agamemnon allows Electra and Orestes to pause and marshal the requisite moral support for what they are going to do. The action then moves fairly quickly, with only a momentary pause as Orestes hesitates, confronted with his mother's plea and her bared breast. Pylades' reply, "What then is left of Apollo's oracles?" (900–902) comes from this apparent extra, or "mute character," as a final, most striking sign of divine approval.⁶⁵ Thus in Aeschylus's version, delay in reaching the anticipated outcome allows a fuller understanding of its justification at both the human and the divine level. Early in the play, Electra asks the chorus what she should pray for when she delivers her mother's offering, and the women answer, "that against the murderers come some divinity or mortal... to kill in return" (119–21). As these lines indicate, our interest rests in learning what kind of agent will perform the retribution: will it be some divine power or a human acting on his own authority? To this extent, dramatic suspense takes us outside the immediate plot to reveal the larger forces at work.⁶⁶

In Sophocles' *Electra*, by contrast, there is greater uncertainty and more frequent delay in the action. In his opening exchange with the tutor, Orestes is much more explicit than his counterpart in Aeschylus about the means of deception—the hidden urn and false account of the chariot race (47–58)—yet he also leaves much more unsaid, making no mention of the two murders they must somehow carry out, thus leaving spectators in the dark about the later stages of their mission. This uncertainty is then heightened by a series of inadvertent obstacles. The very entrance of Electra at the end of the prologue is

considered an impediment by the tutor, who rushes Orestes offstage. Although the news Chrysothemis brings of impending imprisonment for Electra is not an obstacle per se, it threatens to deflect the plot in an unfamiliar direction. On hearing that Orestes is dead, Electra's plan to take revenge on her own likewise promises to carry events into uncharted waters; and the emotional reunion with Orestes runs the risk, as the tutor forcefully points out (1336–40), of betraying their plans altogether. These delays are all triggered by the presence of Electra, and all allow a fuller appreciation of her character: Electra's love for Orestes is so strong that it threatens to undermine his plans at the very beginning of the drama, and after their reunion, her hatred for her mother and Aegisthus is so powerful that it threatens to deflect the plot into an underground cell or a quixotic attempt at revenge. Sophocles' use of delay and suspense thus illuminates the character of his protagonist.⁶⁷

Euripides' version of the story generates what we might call "prosaic suspense"—a series of delays and obstacles that turn out to be less momentous than those in Sophocles and relatively easily overcome. As in Sophocles, only the first steps of the plan are announced in the prologue, but in this case they leave more unsaid (no plan is at hand to enter Argos, let alone kill the rulers) and are more explicitly uncertain (at lines 100–101, Orestes reveals that he will devise a plan once reunited with Electra). As in Sophocles, we have a series of obstacles: the farmer recognizes Orestes against his will; Orestes can think of no way to carry out the revenge; Orestes questions the justice of killing his mother; and Clytemnestra, when she enters, is disarmingly sympathetic to Electra and remorseful for what she has done. These obstacles are overcome in sometimes unexpected ways: the farmer's premature recognition of Orestes is not a problem once the farmer's loyalty is known; Orestes' lack of ideas is compensated for by the detailed schemes of Electra and the farmer; Orestes' doubts are forcefully rejected by Electra; and Clytemnestra's remorse is lost on her single-minded daughter. These delays are not triggered by an obsessive protagonist but are more or less chance developments involving several different characters that are resolved in relatively ordinary ways. Suspense and uncertainty are a necessary feature of any drama, but Euripides' prosaic suspense draws particular attention to the challenges of living in the present. Aeschylus uses delay to suggest the presence of larger forces, Sophocles employs it to explore the depths of human emotions, and Euripides uses it to dwell on the vicissitudes of experience.

The present, as a site of action and suspense, may thus provoke uncertainty for characters who do not know what is to come and lack an authorial perspective. In the opening scenes of *Heracles*, this uncertainty becomes intolerable. Heracles has gone to Hades to fetch Cerberus; in his absence, the tyrant Lycus has seized power and now plans to kill the remaining members of Heracles' family. Whereas they once felt sure he would return, the hero has been gone so long that Megara and Amphitryon can have no confidence in the future. Megara despairs, but the old man wants to wait.

ME. There is no hope left that our friends
will save us. So share with me what's
on your mind, unless we have to die
and are feebly prolonging time.

AM. My daughter, in our situation it is not so easy
to toss out vehemence and cheap advice.

ME. Do you crave pain? Or love life so much?

AM. Yes I do. And I love hope.

ME. So do I, but no one should expect the impossible.

AM. Postponing holds a cure for evils.

ME. The time in between is painful. It eats me away! (84–94)

Euripides tells us that living in the uncertain present is painful, and without hope for the future, we must either abandon the struggle along with Megara or live on with Amphitryon's minimal expectations.

All things change from one another.
The bravest man always relies on
hope. Only a coward gives up. (104–6)

This is a striking revision of traditional values, according to which the bravest man (105) is always able to look after himself and his friends; by Amphitryon's topsy-turvy standards, clinging to hope when he can do nothing else is a heroic accomplishment.⁶⁸

The strain of living in the present is sometimes so great that characters long to be transported or transformed out of it. In *Hippolytus*, after Hippolytus denounces Phaedra and she decides she must die, the chorus sings:

I wish I were in steep hollows
where god would make me a bird

with wings amid flying flocks,
and I would soar over the swelling sea
of Adria's shore
and the water of Eridanos. (732–37)

In *Helen*, as Menelaus and Helen finalize their scheme to outwit the barbarian Theoclymenus, the women who will be left behind sing:

If only we could fly
through the air over Libya
where lines of birds
flee the winter storm, following the call
of their venerable
leader. (1478–84)

The members of the chorus long to escape from the dramatic present, even as they acknowledge that such escape is impossible. These “escape odes” explore simultaneously the characters’ rootedness in the present and the sometimes intolerable pain this imposes.⁶⁹ Such odes, however, are relatively rare. Euripides prefers to explore this paradox not by dwelling on the fantasy of escape but through a sympathetic portrayal of the present with all its constraints and possibilities, freedom and blindness.

As we have seen, Euripides shifts authority from the past and from an atemporal perspective to the present. The shift brings with it excitement, suspense, and uncertainty, as characters and audience must cope without the stability and certainty of a privileged vantage point. An important ideological benefit of this shift is freedom. Without the certainties imported from the past and without the order imposed by hindsight, characters in the dramatic present have greater freedom to speak and act as they wish. This license is closely bound to the democratic value of freedom in speech, or *parrhesia*.⁷⁰ Euripides and his characters reputedly indulged in this license in his first *Hippolytus*, the lost *Hippolytus Veiled*, in which Phaedra shamelessly propositioned her son-in-law. In Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, Aeschylus attacks Euripides for making a whore out of Phaedra (1043), and a scholiast remarks more generally on a plot that was “unseemly and reprehensible” (hypothesis). Aristophanes further describes this freedom in the exchange between Aeschylus and Euripides.

EUR. And from the opening words I left no one idle,
but the wife would talk, and the slave as well,
and the master and the maiden and the old lady too.

AES. Yes, and you should die for such boldness.

EUR. By Apollo, I was acting democratically! (*Frogs* 948–52)

In giving both the shameless Phaedra and the unscrupulous nurse license to speak, Euripides was staging democratic values. Where Aeschylus preferred the heroic authority of past battles and warriors, Euripides shifted authority to present, ordinary experience.

... introducing domestic affairs that we take part in, are
involved in,
that you can recognize and quiz me on—so those folk there
can test my skill. I didn't go boasting and barking,
shaking people out of their wits and scaring them with
Kyknoses and Memnons and trumpet-bridled horses.

(*Frogs* 959–63)

This license is most morally shocking in the figures of Phaedra and Stheneboia, who each pursues onstage her passion for her husband's son or guest.⁷¹ It is most theatrically shocking in *Orestes*. That play stages an escalation of outrageous demands and deeds, from Helen's request that Electra oblige her by placing an offering on the tomb of the mother she murdered to Orestes' attempt to murder Helen and his willingness to kill Hermione and burn down the palace of Argos.⁷² In this case, the outrageous freedom of Orestes meets its match in Menelaus, who is equally willing to storm the palace and kill his brother's children. Yet this freedom can take less shocking forms as well. Medea's murder of her own children is shocking indeed. But her moment of greatest freedom, her difficult decision between love and revenge, revolves around the relatively common situation of infidelity and the familiar emotions and dilemmas this arouses. Heracles' decision to live, to forgo suicide, involves accepting the momentous freedom of ordinary, unheroic experience.⁷³ Democratic ideology vested authority in the assembly of the people, giving all citizens, individually, the license to speak, and giving the whole people, collectively, the authority to act as it wished. On the stage of the Pnyx, the process of debate and decision took place in the present, with all the excitement and uncertainty that this freedom bestowed.

A similar freedom was enacted on the Euripidean stage, but only in what might be called a nonideological manner. Aristocratic ideology used the authority of the past to assert and reinforce its values, invoking heroic models to assert the special worth of those from good families and their claim to the privileged exercise of power. Democratic ideology used the autonomy of the present to reverse these values, attributing to the collective actions of the people the worth and the power previously claimed by the elite. Thucydides spells this out in the funeral oration he ascribes to Pericles. The

Athenians, Pericles claims, are so effective in war partly because they live in the present.⁷⁴

There are certain advantages, I think, in our way of meeting danger voluntarily, with an easy mind, instead of with laborious training, with natural rather than with state-induced courage. We do not have to spend our time practicing to meet sufferings that are still in the future; and when they are actually upon us we show ourselves just as brave as these others who are always in strict training. (2.39.4)

According to Pericles' characterization, because they live in the present, the Athenians as a group, as a polis, are anointed with all the power and grace of a Homeric hero.

When we do kindnesses to others, we do not do them out of any calculation of profit or loss: we do them without forethought, relying on our free liberality. Taking everything together then, I declare that our city is an education to Greece, and I declare that, in my opinion, each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and owner of his own person, and do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility. (2.40.5–2.41.1)

The democratic sense that the present is empowering or enabling is absent in Euripides, who stresses both its autonomy and its helpless confusion. Autonomy, in other words, does not necessarily involve control. For Thucydides' Pericles, the present demos has control both of itself and of its destiny. Euripides' Orestes, by contrast, has unbounded license but no control. He is free to abuse his grandfather Tyndareus, free to tell Menelaus that he owes Orestes one infanticide in exchange for the death of Iphigenia, free to demand that the Argives honor him as a hero for killing his mother, free eventually to burn down the palace and overturn the traditional story. Yet his license is matched, step by step, by that of those who oppose him, until only Apollo on the machine can resolve the impasse.

The Present Context

Both freedom and confusion recede with hindsight. Through suffering comes understanding, as the saying goes, and the greater the perspective we gain, the better our chances of escaping confusion and viewing events, at least in part, as connected by some form of necessity. This double vision of events—experienced in the present but understood more clearly in hindsight—is crucial to tragedy and is epitomized in *Oedipus the King*, where the spectators can see what happened while the protagonist is still immersed in the present. When the chorus in *Agamemnon* looks back on events at Aulis, its

recollection combines a sense both of the king's freedom and of the constraint or necessity he could not avoid.

And when he put on the yoke of necessity,
breathing his spirit's evil swerve,
impure and unholy, then his mind
changed to utter ruthlessness. (218–21)

Euripides, in concentrating on the dramatic present, tends to disavow the privilege of hindsight. Phaedra dies without being able to look back on her experience and try to make sense of it; Jason suffers pain and humiliation without reaching a position from which he can understand why. As I have noted elsewhere, such hindsight is formally compartmentalized into the epilogue speech of a *deus ex machina*;⁷⁵ as a result, characters are not assimilated to the author's point of view. The dramatic characters do not struggle, as Oedipus did, to reach an understanding of why things happened this way, and their blindness stands in stark contrast to the privileged understanding of the god on the machine. In the end, Oedipus lacks sight but, through suffering, has acquired insight or understanding; Euripidean characters, by contrast, are afflicted with the ordinary blindness of living in the present.

The possibility (or lack thereof) of a fuller understanding has important implications. Imperial ideology rests on the premises that the ruling power has the ability to control events and that this power has arisen through some kind of divine dispensation or natural law. For Greeks looking back to the distant past, the Trojan War could demonstrate that Greek cultural hegemony was somehow necessary or inevitable. For Thucydides' Pericles, Athenian perseverance and determination are the causes for the greatness of Athens.

Remember, too, that the reason why Athens has the greatest name in all the world is because she has never given into adversity but has spent more life and labor in warfare than any other state, thus winning the greatest power that has ever existed in history, such a power that will be remembered forever by posterity. (2.64.3)

The present in which Pericles speaks, however, is difficult and unsettling. The Spartan invasion and the plague left many Athenians wondering whether their empire was worth the price. Pericles must therefore cement their faith in Athens's imperial destiny by anticipating the future and the perspective it will bestow: a "power that will be remembered forever by posterity" is surely a power merited. Even so, that power—and that certainty—remain vulnerable: "The brilliance of the present is the glory of the future stored up

forever in the memory of man. It is for you to safeguard that future glory and to do nothing now that is dishonorable” (2.64.5–6). Pericles’ exhortation, in other words, is for the Athenians almost literally to become the authors of their imperial destiny by securing an author’s privileged perspective. Euripides, by contrast, disavows this privilege in representing civic or imperial narratives as well as individual experience.

Civic Origins

Euripidean presentness, in other words, can extend to political and ideological plots. The clearest example involves the story of Athenian origins and of the city’s claim to empire in *Ion*. The drama begins with the problem of Athenian civic autonomy, since Creusa, sole descendant of the city’s early kings, is not only childless but also married to the foreigner Xuthus. The problem of the plot is for Creusa to find a legitimate heir and, hence, for Athens to validate its civic identity. The play concludes with a resounding validation of the city’s origins, as Creusa brings to Athens her son by the god Apollo. It concludes with an equally resounding validation of the city’s destiny, as the goddess Athena proclaims from the machine that the descendants of Ion, or Ionians, will colonize Greece and Asia, while the descendants of Creusa and Xuthus will become the other Greek peoples, Dorians and Achaeans.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Euripides concentrates on the present in a manner that obscures the necessity of imperial destiny. He does this in three ways. His first and most direct method is to challenge the divine authority that legitimates it. Hermes announces in the prologue that the action takes place at Delphi, where “Phoebus sings to mortals, continually prophesying what is and what will be” (6–7). As Hermes assures us, Apollo’s control extends to present events, to the arrival of Creusa and Xuthus, and to what will follow.

They have come to Apollo’s oracle here
desiring children. Loxias directed chance to this result and is not heedless as he
seems.

He will give his own son to Xuthus
when he enters the oracle and will say he is
Xuthus’s, so when he comes to his mother’s house,
Creusa will know him, Apollo’s marriage will
be hidden, and the boy will have his inheritance.

(66–73)

Yet the plot largely consists of a breakdown in Apollo’s control. His “marriage” (i.e., his rape of Creusa) does not remain hidden. The first half of the play is largely devoted to a woman’s successful attempt to overcome the silence imposed by social norms and to speak out

against the sexual indignity she has suffered.⁷⁷ Apollo's pronouncement concerning Xuthus and Ion backfires repeatedly—when Ion asks awkward questions about whether Xuthus is really his father; when Ion doubts that he will be accepted or will be happy in Athens; when Creusa, refusing to accept that Xuthus, not she, has a son, plans to murder the intruder; and finally when Ion refuses to believe that Apollo would practice deception and demands an explanation. The gap between Apollo's planned orchestration and the course events actually follow is underscored at the end. Only the entrance of Athena on the machine can prevent Ion from rejecting "feeble" explanations (1546) and demanding truth from the god. Athena says she comes from Apollo, "who did not think it right to appear before you, to avoid public censure of what has happened, but instead sent me to speak to you" (1557–59). She openly admits that Apollo's scheme did not work (1563–68) and concludes with a new (but no more promising) scheme to keep Xuthus, rather than Creusa, in the dark (1601–2). In the present, human interests and human concerns have an autonomy that cannot be controlled or determined by the god.⁷⁸ Paradoxically, what Apollo directs, according to Hermes, is chance (τὴν τύχην / ἐς τοῦτ' ἐλαύνει, 67–68).

Second, if the divine scheme that validates imperial power is a feeble fiction, so is the civic power that maintains it. When Xuthus emerges from the temple and proclaims that Ion, the first person he meets, is the son promised him by Apollo, the young man resists. As Knox has noted, there is strong sexual innuendo in this scene,⁷⁹ but its effect is not purely comic. The foreign king who has laid claim to Athens now asserts his rights over the Athenian-born Ion, dramatizing his claim in the assertion of sexual mastery over the young man's body. The young man successfully resists the king's advances, but when he is promised a royal inheritance in Athens, his resistance becomes more overtly political.⁸⁰ The king offers to exchange Ion's homelessness (576) for a secure place in Athens and to replace his powerlessness, poverty, and low birth with power, wealth, and nobility (578–81). Yet Ion refuses with a withering critique of the pretensions of power.

But father, hear what
I know. They say that famous earthborn
Athens is no immigrant race,
so I will arrive there doubly impaired,
my father a foreigner and myself a bastard.
With this blot against me I will be powerless;
I will be called nothing, of no account.
But if I try to be someone, charging
to the first seat in the city, the weak who

always resent the strong will hate me.
And those with wealth and power who wisely
remain silent, not eager for politics—
to them I'll be a fool, a laughingstock,
not minding my business in a suspicious city.
If I gain reputation, I'll be hemmed in
all the more by the votes of those
in power. That's how it goes, father:
the men who rule cities and hold office
are most hostile to rivals. (588–606)

Xuthus, like Pericles, assumes that the exercise of power is its own validation, that power confirms the necessity of wielding it. Yet Ion rejects this belated self-justification and asks about the present process of acquiring and maintaining power. If we assume a quest for power without privileged knowledge that the quest will succeed, if we situate the struggle for power in the present, we find it fraught with countless risks and dangers.

The third obscurity is a narrative one. Although Ion eventually agrees to go to Athens, we do not see what happens when he gets there. The play ends with the reunion of Ion and his mother in Delphi, and we are left to wonder how the bastard Ion will be received in Athens. As long as the truth of his birth remains hidden, according to Apollo's revised scheme, he will be an outsider, the bastard son of a foreigner ineligible for citizen status. If the truth of his Athenian descent becomes known, making him acceptable to the Athenians, he will become an unwanted stepson and dangerous rival to Xuthus. The plot, in other words, remains arrested in the present, blind to the future stories that will somehow enable the city's imperial destiny.⁸¹ Athena may proclaim this destiny, but the drama does not envision it.

Imperial Ambitions

In *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Euripides turns to the Trojan War and its validation of Greek supremacy. The plot has a simple and radical premise, revisiting the pivotal moment in *Agamemnon* at which the leader of the expedition chooses to put on the yoke of necessity,⁸² yet viewing this moment not in hindsight, through the song of a chorus reflecting on the past, but as he performs it in the present. This shift in perspective is signaled from the start with an experimental prologue: rather than begin with a narrative prologue explaining how the situation arose, this play begins with a hesitant and uncertain exchange between the king and an old servant. The metrical form of this exchange is as open as its content, consisting not of spoken dialogue but of recitative anapests and beginning not with the

narrative coherence of rhesis but with jagged portions of lines.

AG: Here, old man, come in front
of the house.

OM: I'm coming. What are you up to,
Lord Agamemnon?

AG: Hurry.

OM: I'm hurrying.
My old age doesn't sleep
and is sharp in these eyes. (1–5)

When the old man asks Agamemnon what is troubling him, the king replies that he envies the old man's simple life. The servant praises a life of nobility, which Agamemnon then describes as “a good thing that will trip you up” (21). He continues:

Honor is sweet,
but when it comes, it causes pain.
Something amiss among the gods
ruins one life; the minds of men,
hard to please,
crush another. (22–27)

The king, whose power would seem to provide greater control over events, is more subject than a servant to life's uncertainties. Only now does the old man describe what he has seen: the king sealing a letter, then tearing it open, over and over, acting like a madman in his helplessness (40–42). Only after this does Agamemnon explain the reasons for his confusion: Calchas's instructions to sacrifice Iphigenia, his own horrified refusal, the threats from Menelaus that induced him to summon his daughter to Aulis, and, most recently, his decision to disavow this scheme. Instead of a narrative prologue that leads from the order and causality of hindsight to the uncertain present, this play begins in the midst of radical uncertainty. The situation is confused and unsettling, the metrical form is ragged, and the king's attempt to gain perspective only multiplies the confusion.⁸³

If we turn the clock back, so to speak, from the hindsight with which Aeschylus's chorus recognizes Agamemnon's error to the point at which he decides to kill Iphigenia, we will not find an ethical moment at which he chooses between the army and his daughter.⁸⁴ As Euripides demonstrates, power is embedded in a whole nexus of transactions, and the power to make such a momentous choice is all the more constrained by debts and obligations. As Agamemnon

attempts to reverse his decision, he confronts the many strands of this web: the old man anticipates the anger of Achilles (124–35); Menelaus intercepts the letter to ensure the fleet will sail; and then, as the brothers argue, a messenger announces that Clytemnestra has arrived. Agamemnon's response marks his distance from his counterpart in Aeschylus. According to the chorus in *Agamemnon*, the commander “changed his mind” (μετέγνυκ, 221) when he put on the yoke of necessity and “dared to become the sacrificial killer of his daughter” (223–24). But in *Iphigenia*, he laments that he has fallen into the yoke: “Alas, what can I say in my misery? Where can I begin? What a yoke of necessity I have fallen into [ἐμπεπτώκαμεν]!” (442–43). This is not the action of a free and powerful leader.⁸⁵ As in the prologue, Agamemnon reverses the familiar contrast between humble and mighty to make the point that those who seem to exercise power and control do not.

So humble birth is useful:

it is easy for them to cry or

say anything, but everything is destitute

for a man of noble birth. The weight of office

stands over us, and we are slaves to the mob.

(446–50)

His lack of freedom is brought home most clearly by the contrast with Menelaus. Seeing his brother's tears, Menelaus abruptly reverses himself, regretting his interference and telling Agamemnon to disband the army rather than kill his daughter. But it is too late. Now that his daughter is here, Calchas, Odysseus, and the men of the army will demand her sacrifice. Menelaus may wish things were different, but Agamemnon, as leader, knows he has no choice.

The situation is profoundly different from that of Medea. Her indecision involved a real choice between clear alternatives and dramatized an internal conflict between vengeful anger and maternal love. Agamemnon's indecision begins as anguish at a decision he felt compelled to make and ends with the recognition that he is powerless to undo it. In other words, although greater power would seem to involve greater power to choose (limited only by the need to avoid the hubris of a Xerxes or the blindness of an Oedipus), Euripides shows the king's lack of freedom, his decisions being not the result of internal motives but external moves in the transactions of empire. Thus Iphigenia is killed not because her father values conquest so highly but because of duties and obligations to his wife, to the priest Calchas, to the soldiers of the army, and to those, such as Odysseus, who feed on the army's power. In this antiworld of manly tears and helpless monarchs, there is something deeply ironic about Iphigenia's

final gesture. Her noble self-sacrifice shines as a beacon against the petty and selfish motives of the other characters, and her spontaneous deed that resolves the dramatic impasse is in striking contrast to their ineffectiveness. Yet what does her deed amount to? Her remarkable freedom consists in choosing the death that has already been forced on her, and her remarkable nobility consists in endorsing a cause irrelevant to the action.⁸⁶ Achilles and Clytemnestra have resolved to fight the sacrifice to the death, when Iphigenia intervenes.

I mean to die. I want to do
this nobly, casting baseness aside.
Look here, mother, I have good reasons.
All Greece is now looking at me—
the crossing of the fleet and the fall of Troy rest with me
and preventing foreigners in the future
from taking women from fertile Greece,
once they pay for Helen's rape by Paris.
By dying I shall prevent all this, and my fame
shall be blessed because I liberated Greece. (1375–84)

This is the language of imperial destiny and, indeed, of the Athenian Empire, which claimed to have liberated Greece from Persian domination. Yet this is also the voice of a young girl endorsing a hideous act that cannot validate, as she claims, notions of Greek supremacy.

Slay me and sack Troy. In the length of time this will be
my memorial and my children, my marriage and reputation.
It is right for Greeks to rule foreigners and not right,
mother, for them to rule us. They are slaves and we are free.

(1398–1401)

Euripides' revision of events at Aulis is to some extent a "humanized" version, one that shows sympathy for Agamemnon's dilemma and gives generous space for his frailty and uncertainty at this moment of crisis. Yet, by the same token, it is a "dehumanized" version, one that denies a comforting portrait of the world in our human image. The notion that Agamemnon at Aulis faced a tragic choice between collective gain and personal sacrifice foists a human and Athenian construction on events, allowing Aeschylus and an earlier audience to read into it themselves and their own concerns. Euripides shows that this construction is false to the many, conflicting, and often unpredictable demands of the moment, which requires us to act even if our freedom is limited and even if we cannot know what stories will be written around it.

The Strategic Present

THUCYDIDES

THUCYDIDES BEGINS his *History* with a clear statement of his scope and purpose.

Thucydides of Athens wrote down the War of Peloponnesians and Athenians, describing how they fought against one another, and began writing as soon as the war broke out, expecting it would be great and more noteworthy than any that came before... (1.1.1)

As critics have noted, this programmatic announcement begins with a more or less conventional identification of the author and his topic and includes an equally conventional, if polemical, claim for the work's significance: the events Thucydides will describe are more important than any before in Greek history, including the Trojan and the Persian Wars.¹ Surprisingly, what is least conventional here—namely, the claim that he began writing his history the moment the war began (ἀρχόμενος εὐθὺς καθισταμένου, i.e., το πολέμου)—has garnered little attention from critics.² No sooner was the war under way than, the historian tells us, he began his work, composing his account even as events were unfolding.³ Thucydides' innovation may not seem particularly striking to us, accustomed as we are to journalists' bulletins from the front and live camera footage, nor does the author advertise his contemporaneity with such formal tricks as mimicking the entries in a diary, but his focus on current events constitutes a new development in Greek historiography. This development involves both a different attitude toward such events and different ways of representing them.

A NEW PROGRAM

It may well be tendentious to speak of Thucydidean innovation when so little of his predecessors' work remains, but what evidence we do have supports this. For example, Hecataeus, in arranging and rationalizing the legends of early Greek heroes in his *Genealogies*, told of the more distant past, as did Pherecydes in his *Histories*; Antiochus of Syracuse turned to civic history, describing the foundation long ago

of cities in Sicily and Italy, while Herodotus told of the Persian Wars two or three generations before his own day. If Herodotus innovated by distinguishing, in von Leyden's terms, a *spatium historicum* (of past events that witnesses may vouch for) from a *spatium mythicum* (of more distant events reported in myth and legend),⁴ Thucydides goes one step further in distinguishing the events of his own day from those of the past. A partial precedent for this can be found in the work of Hellanicus, a contemporary of Thucydides, whose *Attic History* reportedly told of the mutilation of the Herms in 415 (F 170 *FGrH*) and the enfranchisement of slaves and the minting of gold coins in 407/6 (F 171–72), thus bringing his account down to his own time; however, Hellanicus also began with the earliest Athenian legends—the exploits of Theseus (F 164–68), the founding of the Panathenaia under Erichthonius (F 39), and even the mythical king Ogygus said to rule at the time of the Great Flood (F 47a). Thus whereas Hellanicus took as his starting point the mythical past and, by extending this story down to the present, did something new, Thucydides begins in the present with the outbreak of war and, by making this alone his subject, is even more original.

This program claims, in particular, that present events are as great (μέγαν) and as noteworthy (ἄξιολογώτατον) as any of those in the past—a striking reversal of cultural values, given that the Greek world (like most agricultural societies) placed great value on tradition, age, and proven worth and considered present events as, by contrast, ephemeral and of dubious significance.⁵ Thus accounts of distant times—from the epic commemoration of the Trojan War to Herodotus's history of the Persian invasions—drew their authority from their subjects, the legendary heroes at Troy and famous leaders at Salamis and Plataea, whereas present events, however critical, fade in importance as soon as they are over; as the historian points out, people end up revering the past again (1.21.2).

The first step in Thucydides' reversal of values comes immediately after the opening words already quoted:

... observing that with all their resources both sides were at full strength for war, and seeing that the other Greeks were taking sides with one or the other, some right away and others planning to. This was the greatest disturbance to take place among the Greeks, involving as it did the foreign world and, so to speak, most of mankind. (1.1.1–2)

This novel claim concerning the present conflict is subsequently reinforced by describing the power and resources of the two sides (1.18–19) and the enormous destruction caused by the war (1.23). Meanwhile, Thucydides takes a second and more important step,

debunking the prestige of legendary times by arguing that past events were relatively insignificant and now often hard to ascertain.

Events before this and events older still could not be found out clearly because of their distance in time, but from the evidence which I found credible in my very lengthy inquiry, I determined there was nothing important in war or anything else. (1.1.3)

From here, the historian launches into a revisionary tour de force, in which the most distant past is not a golden age but a period of poverty and dislocation; in which the notion of a shared cultural past is a recent construction unknown to Homer; in which the heroic age involves robbery and piracy; in which the Trojan War is a small expedition doomed from the start by a lack of provisions; and in which Greek cities have acquired prosperity, stability, and military power only gradually and quite recently (1.2–21). Whatever else this account of early times (or “Archaeology”) may do,⁶ it certainly clears the way for a new emphasis on current events.

As Thucydides points out, the present has yet another advantage: it lends itself to greater accuracy. He maintains that unlike the accounts of past events that have been embellished by poets and orators, evidence for his own times can be subjected to close scrutiny (1.21.1). Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude that Thucydides’ program is purely methodological: he explains that the past is inherently difficult to trust, even with all the evidence (1.20.1),⁷ and is thus not unlike the present, as many Greeks are mistaken about current affairs (1.20.3), and even eyewitnesses tend to give contradictory reports due to bias or poor memory (1.22.3). In other words, Thucydides’ interest in present events is not a necessary result of his desire for accuracy but is instead integral to his new conception of history. After all, the criterion of accuracy only enters Thucydides’ introduction tangentially, whereas he places at front and center his project’s relationship to the present: he wrote down the war, describing how they fought, and “began writing as soon as the war broke out.”

A New Perspective

The originality of Thucydides’ project is underscored by the historian’s novel approach to chronology. Thucydides uses a scheme based entirely on the present to replace the traditional authority of the mythic past, the prestige of descent by generations from heroes, and the civic time lines of public officials. To make this innovation intelligible, he first collates its starting point with the prevailing

schemes in Athens, Sparta, and Argos, but from there he reckons according to “the first year of this war,” “the second year of this war,” and so on. Whereas Hellanicus includes contemporary events within the larger framework of a civic narrative beginning in the distant past, Thucydides divorces these from the past, giving the present war its own, independent time line. Likewise, to situate events within a particular war year, Thucydides replaces the months of the various civic calendars⁸ with a simpler succession of seasons, sometimes reckoning by winters and summers (5.20.3), at other times situating an event “as spring began” (2.2.1) or “around when the grain is full” (4.1.1).⁹ This divorces the narrative from the institutions, time lines, and calendars of any particular city.

Reporting events as they develop, rather than in hindsight, offers the narrator two advantages. First, because the person describing events may also participate in them, he can vouch for such happenings directly. For example, in the literary diary, the narrator is also the protagonist, who reports his or her actions and feelings from day to day—a narrow focalization that presents the text as an authentic record of the speaker’s experience. Unlike Herodotus, Thucydides casts himself as a character within his history and an eyewitness of its events.¹⁰ He began writing because, he tells us, he was able to discern for himself the scale of this conflict (1.1); he also heard many of the speeches he records and was present at many of the events (1.22); he both observed the symptoms of the plague in others and endured them himself (2.48); he served as Athenian general and also participated in the attempt to save Amphipolis from Brasidas (4.104–7). Not insignificantly, he begins his account of the Decelean War with a forceful statement that he can vouch for his report.

I lived through all of [the war], being of an age to understand and resolving to get an accurate knowledge. It happened that I was exiled from my city for twenty years after I was general at Amphipolis, and since I was present at events on both sides, especially the Spartan because of my exile, I was better able to learn of them at my leisure. (5.26.5)

Although, unlike the modern diarist, the Athenian author and general is not the protagonist of his story and does not employ the formal devices (i.e., a header reporting the date and a sustained first-person narrative) that would constantly draw the reader’s attention to his place in the action, Thucydides, in striking contrast to his predecessors (and in a manner Xenophon would emulate), is nevertheless present in his own history—a fact of which he reminds the reader with his device of “signing” successive narrative units: “and so ended the second [third, fourth, etc.] year of this war recorded by Thucydides” (2.70, 2.103, 3.25, etc.).

Second, in describing present events, the narrator as author is in a position to reproduce their openness or indeterminacy. For example, in a serialized novel, the narrator publishes only one week's installment at a time (for readers to consume along with the news), thus giving the impression that the author—just like the reader—is unsure how things will turn out (Tolstoy claimed that this was indeed the case with *War and Peace*).¹¹ Thus Thucydides, unlike his predecessors,¹² divides his narrative into annual installments that bring the reader up to date one season's campaigns at a time; by narrating the events of a single military season and marking a strong formal break at the end of it, the author reproduces the experience of awaiting unknown future developments. This effect is reinforced by the historian's practice of further dividing each season into discrete narrative units and starting each one with a formulaic sentence. Carolyn Dewald observes in *Thucydides' War Narrative*, "the regularity of the introductory sentences suggests that Thucydides may have structured his first efforts at recording the events of the war in a journal-like format, with each new introductory sentence standing as the rubric for another entry."¹³

Thucydides, however, does not explicitly disavow knowledge of events to come, as a modern diarist would. On several occasions, he looks forward to the future—not to argue that a certain outcome was inevitable, but as a way of reflecting on the broader significance of a given event.¹⁴ For example, when speaking of Alcibiades' support for the Sicilian expedition, he notes in passing that the general's personal extravagance would later contribute to the downfall of Athens (6.15.3). After describing the revolution in Corcyra, he remarks that such violence later became common (3.82.1) and thus motivates his general reflections on the perversion of values that accompanies civil strife. In reporting Brasidas's success in Thrace, he adds that the Spartan's generosity contributed to the later willingness of Athenian allies to revolt (4.81). Most famously, after explaining Pericles' war strategy, Thucydides goes on to contrast this leader's wisdom with the private ambitions of his successors, which, he claims, contributed to the city's defeat (2.65).¹⁵ Thus the narrator anticipates the future in order to motivate judgment of the episode at hand, rather than to demonstrate a connection between earlier and later events.¹⁶

Other Perspectives

This chapter provides a closer look at Thucydides' account of "this war," describing the strategies he uses to convey to his reader the "presentness" and openness of events and arguing that his narrative

requires the reader to think critically about central Athenian values. I am not the first to observe certain “present” aspects of Thucydidean narration. Three scholarly approaches in particular highlight presentness in ways substantially different from mine. First, in his Sather Lecture on the historian’s literary qualities, H. D. F. Kitto points out that Thucydides rarely looks forward or backward but instead puts his reader “into the presence of the actors in the event,” so that “[a]lways we are kept just behind that moving curtain which divides present from future.”¹⁷ The narrative method he refers to is the historian’s tendency to report events or speeches without passing judgment (his “famous reticence”) and then moving on, “keep[ing] pace with events” rather than stepping aside to provide his own analysis.¹⁸ For Kitto, this restraint at the local level contrasts with abundant interconnections at the level of the work as a whole, producing a subtle kind of dramatic irony whereby the reader can, on reflection, see patterns and draw conclusions unavailable to the actors in the thick of things. Thus his primary interest is in the *poiesis*, or careful composition, that connects distant parts of the *History*, whereas I shall here be more concerned with the techniques that make the narrative seem “present.” Kitto’s purpose is to show that Thucydides was more (in ancient terms) a *poietaes* than (in modern terms) an objective historian, and mine is not so much to emphasize his similarities with Homer or Sophocles as to examine his differences from such predecessors as Herodotus.

Second, in his article “Narrative Discourse in Thucydides,” W. Robert Connor observes that the historian “creates in the reader the feeling of being directly present at an episode in the war,” drawing readers into his account of events “until they feel they are themselves present, actually experiencing them.”¹⁹ The immediacy Connor describes is, however, visual rather than narrative, an effect not of the arrangement of events but of vivid description, or *enargeia*, involving details—such as a spear-point jammed into a lock to prevent escape (2.4.3) or the Athenian apprehension after the disaster in Sicily that their enemies would all converge on them at once (8.1.2–3). Connor’s observations are useful but address strictly static vignettes and so have little bearing on my concern with the temporal aspect of narrative.

Third, in a lengthy reading of the Corcyrean conflict, James V. Morrison uses narratology to extend Kitto’s observations in another direction. He points out that Thucydides’ authorial reticence often amounts to a “lack of closure” or “lack of guidance” requiring the reader to evaluate episodes on his or her own, that Thucydides’ willingness to leave events unconnected produces a “punctuated history” demanding effort from the reader, and that this “engaged”

reader, immersed as he or she is in the flow of narration, lacks the “retrospective” reader’s awareness of larger patterns. Morrison’s description of Thucydidean narrative has much in common with my own, but his explanation is closer to Kitto’s. Whereas Kitto considers the irony in Thucydides’ *History* dramatic, Morrison regards it as didactic, insofar as it “trains” the engaged reader to work out the best course of action in a given situation.²⁰ By replacing Kitto’s tragically limited actor with an apprentice in political analysis, Morrison has Thucydides look forward to Plato’s “interactive” dialogues rather than backward to Greek poetry. I doubt, however, that the *History* is didactic in this narrow sense, and while Morrison correctly describes Thucydides’ narrative techniques, such techniques are not necessary for the didactic project he proposes, leaving Morrison to fall back on a weak explanation—that Thucydides “was striving to produce a substitute that could serve in some way for that vivid participation in civic affairs which was no longer available to him” after his exile.²¹ This chapter examines the situation of Kitto’s actor or Morrison’s engaged reader, considering in some detail how the narrative situates them in the present and the issues this kind of narrative raises.²²

In the next section of this chapter, I show that Thucydides’ account of the outbreak of war makes it clear that this event need not have followed from what preceded it, and I contrast this account with Herodotus’s approach; my discussion identifies a number of strategies that reinforce this narrative openness. In the section titled “Narration,” I turn from the general openness of historical events to the small-scale organization of Thucydides’ episodes, arguing that the historian, particularly in contrast with Herodotus, portrays events as “atomic,” or substantially independent of one another. Finally, in the section titled “Present Alternatives,” I consider some social and political implications of the *History*, arguing that the importance of change and uncertainty in this work questions cherished Athenian values.

BEGINNINGS

To appreciate how Thucydides launches his narrative, it is useful to compare the example of Herodotus, who likewise sets out in a preface the scope and aims of his work.

Herodotus of Halicarnassus here publishes his investigations, so that human achievements might not in time pass away, so great and remarkable deeds displayed by Greeks and foreigners might not lack fame, and above all the reason why they went to war with one another. (l. proem)

Since Homer, one of the primary tasks of the writer has been to preserve great deeds from oblivion, celebrating and committing to collective memory such events as the Trojan War between Greeks and foreigners. To this extent, Herodotus's aims are conventional.²³ Yet he also promises something new, first in the nature of his work, which is described immediately after his name as ἱστορίη (inquiry conducted by the individual rather than collective knowledge inherited from a prior generation), and second in its method, which above all involves the cause, or αἰτία, of the conflict.

The historian illustrates these claims by rejecting a certain kind of αἰτία that relies on events beyond the reach of responsible ἱστορίη according to Persian reports, the Phoenicians were responsible for the disagreement, as long ago they came into commercial conflict with the Greeks—a conflict indirectly recorded in the myths about Io, Europa, Medea, and Helen. This rejection of rationalized myth is every bit as clever as Thucydides' debunking of the *Iliad* in his "Archaeology" and likewise clears the ground for a new kind of historiography. After mentioning that the Phoenicians disagreed with the Persians, Herodotus continues:

I am not going to say about these things that they happened like this or like that, but the one whom I myself know [τὸν δὲ οἶδα αὐτόν] first began unjust deeds against the Greeks—him I shall point out and then continue forward in my story, encountering human cities both small and large. (1.5.3)

The historian's emphasis on known causes excludes the uncertain events of the mythical past, so he cannot invoke Io or Europa, even in rationalized form, as a source of the conflict, whereas he himself knows (as does the reader) about Croesus and his conquest of Ionia. Herodotus thus narrows his inquiry to exclude the more distant past (just as Thucydides would further narrow his investigation to exclude all but the present and immediate past).²⁴ In doing so, he paradoxically widens his scope.

Of things that were great in the past, many became small, and of those great in my day, many were small before. Knowing therefore that human fortune never remains constant, I shall recall both alike. (1.5.4)

Accounts of the distant past are necessarily limited to the great cities and events recorded by tradition, but an account of the more recent past that individuals themselves can investigate may include both the great and the small.

On the one hand, therefore, we find in Herodotus what we might call a Protagorean revolution, or a recognition that critical inquiry must carefully distinguish its appropriate objects. For Protagoras,

human knowledge of what is cannot extend to the gods (B4); for Herodotus, human knowledge of what was—that is, events of the past and their causes—cannot extend to the world of myth. On the other hand, as I shall show, his inquiry remains concerned with the actual past and not (as in Thucydides' own revolution) with the present and its potential.

How to Begin?

It is worth reflecting here on the problem of beginnings, since historiography deals with events that are not circumscribed by the career of a single hero or protagonist. If, at the beginning of a work, the historian looks backward to the antecedents to this starting point, why should he not go back further still to the antecedents of those events, and so on, in infinite regress? To begin without considering how the initial situation arose undermines the historian's goal of somehow making events intelligible to the reader who knows that beginnings do not "just happen." A common solution is to look back one step to the proximate cause, as does Homer at the beginning of the *Iliad*, when he explains the wrath of Achilles by turning back to the episode with Chryses that triggered the quarrel with Agamemnon. Similarly Herodotus, having named Croesus as his starting point, goes back to explain how the Lydian came to be king—although the proximate cause in this case lies further in the past, in the change from one dynasty to another. A closer look at the backward glance in Herodotus will clarify, by means of contrast, the procedure of Thucydides.

Herodotus begins with Croesus (1.6.1) because he is the first person the historian (and presumably his audience) knows to have harmed the Hellenes—a point he reinforces in speaking of the conquest of Ionia: Croesus is the first we know of (1.6.2) to have conquered the Hellenes, who before his rule were all free (1.6.3). But if this is the beginning, how did it come about? How did Croesus, who was not of the royal house of the Heraclidae, come to be ruler of Lydia? Such questions lead Herodotus, at the beginning of his narrative, to look backward for a specific cause or explanation. He explains, "the rule, which belonged to the Heraclidae, passed to the family of Croesus in the following way" (1.7.1), and he proceeds to relate how a change in dynasty occurred when Gyges killed Candaules and took his place as ruler of Lydia. The story of Gyges is significant in several respects. For one thing, just as the story of Chryses in the *Iliad* is not only the immediate cause for Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon but also a model for how such quarrels may be

resolved,²⁵ so, too, Gyges' accession is not only a cause for Croesus's rule but also an example of how foreign rulers are vulnerable to intrigue, passion, and feminine guile. My interest here is in a further aspect of this story: the degree of determinism involved.

For Herodotus, the change in dynasty was a crucial turning point, a fork in the road that would determine whether power would remain with the Heraclidae or would pass to others. In his foolish pride, Candaules badgered Gyges, his bodyguard, into admiring the beauty of his naked wife, even arranging for him to hide behind their bedroom door. Unexpectedly, however, the queen noticed Gyges leaving the room and confronted him the next day.

There are now two paths before you, Gyges, and I give you the choice of following whichever you want: either kill Candaules and take me and the kingdom of Lydia, or you yourself must die at once lest you obey Candaules in everything and in the future see what you should not. Either the man who planned these things must die, or you who did wrong and saw me naked. (1.11.2–3)

Gyges begged her not to compel him to make such a choice (1.11.3), but he could not persuade her. Once he saw that either he or his master must die, he chose to live. The narrator could not have more clearly signaled this turning point in the story, since the choice of Gyges is not just a personal matter of life and death but a larger issue involving the kingdom and the royal dynasty. How is this choice portrayed? If Gyges has two different paths he may follow, does the narrator suggest that either one was a real alternative, or are we left with the sense that only one was viable? In other words, is this decisive moment portrayed “in the present,” with the potential for more than one outcome, or is it viewed as past, as part of a course already realized?

In these terms, Herodotus presents Gyges' dilemma as past. First of all, the queen does not truly offer him any choice: from her point of view, it matters not whether Gyges or Candaules dies—either way her shameful treatment will be avenged—but from Gyges' point of view, there is no viable option, even though, as a loyal member of the king's bodyguard, the last thing he wants to do is kill the king. We do not see him deliberate, torn between the competing demands of loyalty to his king and self-preservation, nor do we see him waver in considering the alternatives. Herodotus reports, “When he saw that the necessity truly confronted him of killing his master or being killed himself, he chose to live” (1.11.4). The queen's two paths, then, in effect constitute a form of compulsion, as evidenced by the language used (ἀναγκαιῶν... ἀναγκαινῶν... ἀναγκάζεις, 1.11.3–4), and we are made

witness to Gyges' dilemma not so that we might understand how a difficult choice was made but precisely that we might, in hindsight, see how the king had to be killed by his own bodyguard.²⁶ In fact, the whole episode is presented as an exercise in hindsight, which brings us to a second point, concerning the narrator's perspective on the story. As we have seen, Herodotus begins by promising to explain how the rule passed from the Heraclidae to the family of Croesus, and this takes him back to Candaules, the last of the Heraclidae to rule Sardis (1.7.2), which in turn takes him back to Gyges. At this point, Herodotus makes explicit the privilege of hindsight: after reporting that the king kept singing the praises of his wife's beauty, Herodotus adds, "after a short time—since things had to turn out badly for Candaules [χρῆν γάρ Κανδαύλῃ γενέσθαι κακῶς]—he said the following to Gyges..." (1.8.2). At the very moment the king announces his plan for Gyges to see his wife naked, the narrator intervenes to assert that the outcome will have to be a bad one. Finally, having completed the story of Candaules' murder, the narrator, at the end of his digression, reestablishes the backward glance: "and in this way Gyges became king" (1.13.2).

The queen exerts compulsion on Gyges, and the narrator in a sense places compulsion on Candaules, yet it does not follow that Herodotus is a determinist. Like Thucydides, he evades determinism, only in different ways. Although the earlier historian looks back on a causal series leading from the foolish scheme of Candaules, to the accession of the Mermnadae, to the kingship of Croesus, he does not quite explain what prompted such a scheme in the first place. The expression χρῆν γάρ, meaning "since it was necessary," mystifies the very causation it asserts, since only by invoking a vague necessity is the king's folly explained. In other words, the account of why things had to happen as they did leaves a residue of indeterminacy that Herodotus wants to ascribe to a mysterious power.²⁷ Thucydides, by contrast, is more materialistic: although, as later discussion in this chapter will show, he does describe the various interests at stake in a given situation, nevertheless, by representing his protagonists in the process of calculating which course to follow, he leaves the outcome uncertain.

Disagreements and Complaints

Like Herodotus, Thucydides grapples with where to begin. The former, having announced that he will start not with Io or Medea but with the conquest of Ionia by Croesus, nevertheless goes back several generations to explain how Croesus became king. On the one hand,

Thucydides, in beginning his account of “this war,” has a task that is easier, since the starting point is obvious—the breaking of the truce between Athens and Sparta. On the other hand, he has a job that becomes considerably harder when he goes back to explain how this happened. Even though the historian goes back just four years and not several generations, he still finds that he must describe these antecedents in such detail that, as a result, readers come to the opening of book 2 before his narrative reaches either the breaking of the truce or the outbreak of war, when the Thebans attack Plataea.

The scale of Thucydides’ excursus on antecedents reflects in large part the scale of his *History*. Whereas Homer, for instance, having announced that his subject is the relatively circumscribed quarrel of Achilles, can satisfy his listener with a brief digression on Chryses, Thucydides has already announced that his subject will be a war greater than any that has come before, and his account of its beginnings will therefore presumably need to be more comprehensive. Whereas Herodotus leads his reader back methodically from the beginning of his history (Croesus) to an antecedent requiring explanation (how rule passed to Croesus’s family), Thucydides is much more circumspect, pointing backward from his own beginning (the breaking of the truce) to unspecified αἰτίαι.

The war itself began when the Athenians and Peloponnesians broke the thirty-year truce that they made after the capture of Euboea. As for why they broke it, my account begins with the complaints and disagreements [τῶς αἰτίας... καὶ τῶς διαφορῶς], so no one will ever need ask how such a war came upon the Greeks. (1.23.4–5)

In the course of his exhaustive account, Thucydides will tell of a choice as critical as Gyges’ and of several turning points that moved the two sides closer to war, but at this particular point, he satisfies our curiosity merely with the mention of complaints and disagreements and with a methodological aside. If we were to ask whether these complaints led necessarily to war, his narrative (discussed shortly) would suggest not, and the explanation he next provides seems to anticipate this very problem.

I think that the truest pretext, although least evident in their words, was that the Athenians, as they became powerful and made the Spartans afraid, impelled them to war. But the accusations [αἰτίαι] openly made on either side, which led them to break the truce and wage war, were the following... (1.23.6)²⁸

Whereas Herodotus evades determinism by muddying the waters, adding to the queen’s emphatic compulsion a vague necessity acting on Candaules, Thucydides offers an awkward dichotomy between, on the one hand, the long series of recriminations that happened to end

in war and, on the other, the grounds not stated by participants (and conjectured by the historian) that necessarily led to war.

Thucydides begins his account of the antecedents to war by observing, “Epidamnus is a city on the right as you sail into the Adriatic” (1.24.1). This abrupt introduction concentrates attention on the geographical point from which his story begins, yet it leaves the reader wondering about its relevance.²⁹ Having aroused suspense, the historian nevertheless gradually dispels it by describing the founding of Epidamnus, its rise to power, and its resentment of Corcyra—developments that would eventually involve first Corinth and then Athens and pave the way for war. Thucydides’ topographical opening has a precedent in the genealogy that Herodotus uses in his opening to create suspense (“Croesus was Lydian by descent, the son of Alyattes,” 1.6.1),³⁰ but with a noteworthy difference: Herodotus almost immediately dispels the suspense by adding, “this Croesus is the first foreigner we know of to compel some Greeks to pay tribute and to form alliances with others” (1.6.2). What remains for his listener is no longer to find his bearings (i.e., to determine what Croesus has to do with this account of the Persian Wars) but to enjoy the filling-out of narrative (i.e., exactly how the storyteller will move from the earlier attack by Croesus to those by Darius and Xerxes).

Thucydides, by contrast, does not fully dispel the suspense for thirty-one chapters. He describes not only the founding of Epidamnus but also the eventual civil strife between democrats and oligarchs, appeals to Corcyra and then to Corinth, the resulting war between Corinth and Corcyra, the Corcyrean request for an alliance with Athens, the debate in Athens leading to a defensive alliance with Corcyra, and the hostilities that follow. Only then does the historian conclude, “and this was the first cause of war against Athens for the Corinthians, since the Athenians fought against them although they were under a truce” (1.55.2). He will not reach the breaking of the truce, his ostensible goal, until even later, at the beginning of book 2. Before this point, loss of bearings (i.e., questions about what a history of Epidamnus has to do with the Archidamian War) gradually gives way to narrative gratification: as the protagonists in his story, the Corcyreans (1.36) and the Athenians (1.44), start to talk about war, the reader starts to wonder just how the narrator will move from these dire warnings to open war. The prolonged suspense of chapters 24–55 is a technique that places the reader in a virtual present as events unfold; I turn now to other techniques of this kind that come into play in this section.³¹

Present Perspective

Having introduced Epidamnus and the city's rise to power, Thucydides proceeds with his narrative.

Finally, just before this war, the people of the city banished [ἐξεδίκξε] the powerful, who now joined the foreigners in pillaging [ἐλίζοντο] those in the city by land and by sea. The Epidamnians who were in the city, since they were being hard pressed [ἐπίεζοντο], sent [πέμπουσιν] an embassy to Corcyra, their mother city,...but the people of Corcyra refused to receive the ambassadors. (1.24.5–7)

Grammatically, the shift in tense from aorist (ἐξεδίκξε) to imperfect (ἐλίζοντο... ἐπίεζοντο) and then to “historical” present (πέμπουσιν) is significant: it progressively increases the immediacy of the narration,³² which does not so much explain a fait accompli as describe a process. As this thread of the narrative is brought before our eyes, Thucydides includes circumstances and constraints that eventually contribute to a present determination. We might thus translate the concluding sentence of the preceding quote more literally as follows: “The Epidamnians in the city, since they were continually being hard pressed, now send an embassy to Corcyra.”

The next critical point in this series of disagreements is the decision of Epidamnus to approach Corinth for help. Whereas Herodotus might have said in retrospect, “a step toward the breaking of the truce was the embassy to Corinth—a provocative move, entrusting themselves to the enemy of their mother city—and the reasons for it were as follows...,” Thucydides recounts the events as if in the present.

Knowing as the Epidamnians did that no help was coming to them from Corcyra, they were now at a loss how to deal with the present situation, so they sent to Delphi asking the god whether they should hand their city over to the Corinthians, who founded it, and try to get help from them. (1.25.1)

In a way similar to the effect of the shifts in tense just outlined, the imperfects here accentuate the process of reaching this difficult decision (ἐνᾶπρ' εἴχοντο... τὸν θεὸν ἐπῆροντο), as the reader wonders—no less than do the Epidamnians—what escape there might be from this desperate predicament. Only after the decision has been made does the aorist aspect resume: the god answered (ἀνείλε), and they handed over the city (παρέδοσαν, 1.25.2).

This present perspective is not constant, but even when Thucydides pauses to explain the situation, he tends to describe not past events per se but the past as it enters into present motivations.

For example, when he reports that the Corinthians, motivated partly by hatred of Corcyra (1.25.3), accepted the Epidamnian offer, he digresses to give the grounds of this Corinthian hatred—namely, that the Corcyreans made no attempt to behave like colonists, failing to give their sponsors the proper honors and looking down on them because of their wealth and naval power (1.25.4). Thus the narrative addresses not an event to be accounted for, such as the accession of Gyges, but the process of deciding to help Epidamnus; and the digression serves to show not the necessary antecedents to this event but, rather, the issues (e.g., lingering resentment) important to the Corinthians in their deliberations.

The subsequent narrative, which describes the reactions and recriminations as the crisis gradually escalates, manages to keep the reader wondering what will happen next and whether this might break the truce. The narrative produces this effect not with prolonged suspense (as with the relevance of Epidamnus) or narrative gratification (gradually fleshing out details of a known event) but with a small-scale, prosaic suspense in which each successive step is uncertain. At first, after the Corinthians have sent aid to Epidamnus, the insulting manner in which the Corcyreans address the people of the city (1.26.3) seems to guarantee hostilities. Yet the Corcyreans proceed to make an offer of amnesty (1.26.5), presumably attempting to weaken resolve inside the city. This offer is rejected (we are not told whether it was merely a diplomatic gambit), with the result that Epidamnus is besieged and the Corinthians mobilize reinforcements (1.27). This causes the Corcyreans to change course, now sending an embassy to Corinth and proposing arbitration (1.28.1–3); diplomatic posturing ensues, with offers and counteroffers that may or may not have been sincere (again, we are not told) but that at least raise the possibility of a negotiated settlement (1.28.4–5). The Corinthians reject all proposals and war immediately follows (1.29). The battle itself is described in half a sentence: “and the Corcyreans won decisively and destroyed fifteen Corinthian ships” (1.29.5). The swiftness of the narrative reinforces the unexpectedness of the outcome, as does its sequel: “it happened that on the same day, those besieging Epidamnus forced it to surrender.” The unanticipated outcome put Corcyra in such a strong position that “for most of the time after the naval battle, they ruled the sea, and they sailed against the allies of Corinth and destroyed them” (1.30.3). Prosaic suspense thus leads by twists and turns from internal dissension in Epidamnus, to conflict between Corcyra and Corinth, and finally to the unexpected Corcyrean hegemony.³³

Strategic Deliberations

The unexpected success of Corcyra has an expectable result: for two years, Corinth improves its navy, determined to crush Corcyra and reassert its control of the seas. The reaction of the Corcyreans mingles fear (as they consider past events) with hope (as they plan for the future).

Learning of their preparation, the Corcyreans were afraid, and (since they did not have allies among the Greeks and had joined neither the Athenian nor the Spartan alliance) thought it best to approach the Athenians, become their allies, and try to get help from them. (1.31.2)

Like the people of Epidamnus earlier, the Corcyreans are at a loss, but their impasse is quickly upstaged by that of the Athenians, who must decide whether to accept the offer.

The issues at stake for the people of Athens are set out in two opposing speeches, which simultaneously instantiate the process of political deliberation: the reader sits, as it were, in the assembly, listening to two speakers put forth conflicting demands and trying to decide which one has more merit,³⁴ while the respective contents of these speeches impress on the listener the multiple considerations to be weighed in reaching a decision.³⁵ The Corcyrean speaker begins by acknowledging that he must show first “that what we are asking is above all in the [Athenians’] best interest and at the very least will not harm them” and second “that our gratitude will be abiding” (1.32.1). This burden on the speaker weighs also on the audience, who must judge what is in Athens’s interest, what is harmful to it, and the value of Corcyrean gratitude. The speaker goes on to excuse the apparent inconsistency of a city that once proudly rejected all alliances but is now asking for protection against Corinth: “It so happens that our former prudence—refusing to share the risks of other people’s plans in an alliance—now turns out to be folly and weakness.” He argues that the Corcyreans now ask for help from Athens not out of cowardice but because events have not matched expectations (1.32.4–5). This constitutes a striking statement on the virtues of adaptability, arguing that the constraints of a new situation may convert prudence (σφροδύνη) into folly and weakness (ἀβουλία καὶ ἀσθένεια): it not only excuses Corcyra’s change in policy but also serves as an example for the Athenian audience, which likewise must be prepared to recalculate its own interests and even to reassess fundamental values.

The speaker from Corcyra then goes on to list the various considerations that bear on the Athenian decision: the virtue that accrues from helping the victim, the goodwill this will earn, and the

sheer power of a navy second only to that of Athens. It is not enough, however, to behold (1.33.2) such advantages—the Athenians must also be able to perceive that the Spartans are eager for war and that the Corinthians even now (1.33.3) are plotting against Athens. Their decision thus requires not only weighing respective advantages but also appreciating that present circumstances demand action. Furthermore, they must try to anticipate the future; as the speaker from Corcyra concludes, the Athenians will not be taking proper forethought if, as he says to them, “looking about right now at the future and virtually present war, you hesitate to acquire a country that both in peace and war is of the greatest consequence” (1.36.1). This urgency of clearly assessing the short-term future is reinforced by a string of vivid, or “emotional,” futures addressed to the Athenians: “if you allow [εἰ περιόψεσθε] two of these [navies] to be combined, and the Corinthians acquire us first [προκαταλήψονται], you will fight against [ναυμαχήσετε] Corcyreans and Peloponnesians together, but if you receive us, you will be able to fight them [ἔξετε... ἀγκνίζεσθαι] with the advantage of our ships” (1.36.3).

A speaker from Corinth now begins with a rebuttal, claiming that Corcyra’s motive is brazen greed, and goes on to draw special attention to the past, reminding the Athenians that Corinth did not interfere when Samos revolted from Athens and that Corinth even actively helped Athens against Aegina. Corinth has thus shown a goodwill that the Athenians must now repay (1.41.1) as they consider obligations toward Corinth that have the authority of time: “let any young man learn of these things from an older man and judge it right to show us the same good service” (1.42.1). According to the Corinthian speaker, these demands of the past are not outweighed by anticipation of a future war (“the approach of war that the Corcyreans use to scare you even now remains uncertain”), and the Athenians should beware of making Corinth an enemy “not in the future but here and now” (1.42.2).

Change and Creativity

By presenting the arguments on both sides in the form of direct speeches, Thucydides re-creates the moment in which the Athenians in assembly hear from Corcyra and Corinth and must decide whether to accept the offer of alliance. The arguments themselves heighten the importance of this moment in which the citizens of Athens must weigh past obligations, present interests, and future repercussions. This is no easy task, as Thucydides at once makes clear; rather than describe the debate that must have ensued, he passes on to a curious sequel: “The

Athenians heard both sides, and the assembly met twice. At the first assembly they favored the arguments of the Corinthians, but at the second they changed their minds and made a defensive alliance with the Corcyreans" (1.44.1). A full alliance with Corcyra would have endangered the truce with the Peloponnesians. Thucydides goes on to give the reasons for this second decision: "it seemed to them that there would be war with the Peloponnesians, and they did not want to give up Corcyra, with such a navy, to the Corinthians, but, by letting them wear one another out, would face war, if necessary, with the Corinthians and other naval powers as weak as possible" (1.44.2). The Athenians, in trying to anticipate the future, eventually calculate that an alliance will best serve their interests later; yet, as the narrative indicates, such assessments are so uncertain that two consecutive meetings yield two quite different decisions. The contrast with Gyges' dilemma could not be sharper: whereas Herodotus explains the change in dynasty by looking back to prior events (particularly to the specious choice imposed on Gyges by the queen), Thucydides explains the breaking of the truce by moving forward from the upheaval in Epidamnus and describing various moments of uncertainty, concentrating in particular on the fluid deliberations in Athens.

This sense of narrative presentness, whereby the reader follows events as they unfold, is sustained throughout this long digression and is reinforced in three ways. First, deliberation involves meaningful choice. Gyges' dilemma masqueraded as a choice; he had a crucial decision to make but was allowed no freedom either by the queen (who "forced" him to decide) or by the narrator (who foretold his evil end). The Athenian assembly, by contrast, has a crucial decision to make and full freedom in making it: the opposing speeches of the Corcyreans and Corinthians spell out the strategic considerations, while the assembly's change of mind unequivocally demonstrates its freedom. Second, the narrator does not prejudice this choice, nor does he anticipate the outcome of deliberations, the assembly's change of mind, or the consequences of its final decision. Third, this choice is not only real and unprejudiced but creative: the assembly is presented with two alternatives—either to form an alliance with Corcyra and thus strengthen the city's position or to reject the alliance and remain on good terms and at peace with Corinth—yet somehow, in the process of reaching a decision, a third option is devised, an unusual defensive alliance designed both to strengthen the city's position and to maintain relations with Corinth.³⁶ The fact that Thucydides does not report the details of these deliberations differentiates his style from modern documentary realism: without reproducing all its incidental details, the ancient historian is able economically to

represent this creative freedom.

Necessary Chance

Thucydides' account of the antecedents to war thus coincides with the program he announced at the start: he approaches events from a different perspective than his predecessors, thereby gaining immediacy but relinquishing hindsight and so leaving his readers to watch events as they unfold. As several turning points center on human decision making, I conclude this section with a different kind of episode. Even before he reaches the breaking of the truce, Thucydides has a battle to narrate, the engagement at Sybota; rather than use this battle to show that events were leading inexorably toward war as his predecessors might have, he indicates that at any moment the outcome might have been different.

Having concluded their defensive alliance with Corcyra, the Athenians send a small force, with instructions to help the Corcyreans only if their territory should be under attack; the Corinthians finish assembling their large expedition and sail against the island, the Corcyreans sail out to meet them, and both sides prepare for battle (1.45–48). In describing this battle, Thucydides not only avoids foreshadowing its outcome but also dwells on the confusion it produces. Because they fought as if on land, the ships became entangled in confusion: “everywhere there was great confusion, and the sea battle was full of uproar” (1.49.4). The Athenians helped beleaguered Corcyreans with a show of force but, following their instructions, did not actually engage the Corinthians; however, Thucydides observes that since the Corcyreans were being overwhelmed by superior numbers, “the Athenians, seeing [them] in greater difficulty, began helping them more openly.” He continues, “At first they avoided ramming anyone, but when the battle had clearly turned and the Corinthians were in pursuit, then they did all they could and wavered no more; thus it necessarily chanced that Corinthians and Athenians fought one another” (1.49.7). The clever oxymoron *ξυνέπεσεν ἐς τοῦτο ἀνάγκης*, meaning “this necessary result came about by chance,” draws attention to what the narrator finds important—that without meaning to, the Athenians found themselves fighting the Corinthians. Nowhere does the narrator look back on a battle that somehow had to happen; he instead places these events in the present, describing positions and movements, old-fashioned battle techniques, and a general noise and confusion. Only after the narrative reaches the point at which the Athenians intervene does his phrase “this necessary result came about by chance” call

attention to the importance of this moment.

What will follow? Will this be considered a violation of the truce that might provoke war, or is this confrontation a red herring? The narrator does not tell us but continues with the ambivalent outcome of the battle: in the face of Athenian reinforcements, the victorious Corinthians retreat,³⁷ and both sides claim victory. In military terms, the battle is a nonevent that fails to decide the conflict among the three powers of Corcyra, Corinth, and Athens; in broader terms, it actually escalates the conflict. As the historian concludes, “this was the Corinthians’ first cause [or “pretext,” αἰτία] for war with the Athenians, since the Athenians fought against them along with the Corcyreans while under the truce” (1.55.2). Nevertheless, in narrative terms, the battle is still indecisive, since “right after this, there happened to occur another difference between Athenians and Peloponnesians leading to war” (1.56.1). The historian goes on to describe events involving Potidaea. Eleven chapters later, he reports that the Corinthians called for a declaration of war on the grounds that Athens had now broken the truce (1.67); only at this subsequent point in the narrative, and not before, do we see the Battle of Sybota as a penultimate step toward war.

The battle itself illustrates the freedom of events, since things might have taken a different course at any moment: if the Corcyreans had gathered a slightly larger force or the Corinthians a slightly smaller one, the battle might have been decided more quickly, and the Athenians would not have been drawn in; if the Athenian reinforcements had come earlier, the Corinthians might have backed off and avoided battle; if the naval techniques on either side had been less primitive, the battle would have been less confusing and more decisive, and the Athenians might not have found themselves helping ships under pressure from the enemy. This freedom of events is recognized by the paradoxical phrase “this necessary result came about by chance” and is demonstrated in action when Athenian reinforcements arrive and turn a hard-won Corinthian victory into an indecisive standoff. Narrative openness leaves the reader wondering whether Athenian involvement will precipitate war with Corinth and its allies or whether it is a false alarm. Only after the unfolding of the events at Potidaea do we see that the battle has actually played a more complex part, not provoking war in its own right, but still sharpening Corinthian anger at a subsequent provocation. For the narrator, events are always, at least to some extent, in the past, and Thucydides can presumably see, in hindsight, that the wavering of the assembly in deciding to form a defensive alliance contributed to the outbreak of war, as did the ambivalent presence of the Athenians at

the indecisive Battle of Sybota; he chooses, however, to describe these events in the present, where they still have the ability to surprise us.

NARRATION

The use of “present perspective” at the beginning of Thucydides’ *History* is interesting because this is not the obvious place for it; a backward glance from the beginning would seem to call for a pronounced use of retrospection, as occurs in both Homer and Herodotus. In the *Iliad*, Homer turns back from his beginning (the anger of Achilles) when he asks about causes: “Which god brought them together in strife and conflict ?” (1.8). This leads him back first to Apollo, then to Agamemnon’s insult, and from there to the speech of Chryses in which the priest asks to ransom his daughter (1.17–21). Herodotus does not immediately look for a divine cause, but having identified Croesus as his starting point, he goes back to explain how the Heraclidae lost hegemony, counting the generations and years between Heracles and Candaules. By contrast, Thucydides, having announced that he will explain how the truce was broken, jumps unexpectedly to Epidamnus, letting events roll forward from there. The specific features I have noted—forms of suspense and narrative uncertainty—are not peculiar to these episodes and are in fact found throughout the *History*; this section of this chapter examines some additional Thucydidean techniques that have the effect of trapping the reader, who is unable to attain a broader perspective, in the present.

A Localized Narrative

The most striking of such techniques is the fracturing of the *History* into campaigning seasons or sometimes even shorter units. This device, as I have noted in other contexts, is a hallmark of Thucydides and is motivated at least in part by his chronographic method; this, however, does not imply that the device lacks literary merit or that Thucydides (as Dionysius of Halicarnassus insinuates) was sacrificing style at the altar of chronological precision.

He wished to follow a new path, untrodden by others, and so divided his history by summers and winters. The result of this was contrary to his expectations: the seasonal division of time led not to greater clarity but to greater obscurity. It is surprising how he failed to see that a narrative that is broken up into small sections describing the many actions that took place in many different places will not catch “the pure light shining from afar.”... The whole of the book is broken up in this way, and the continuity of the narrative is destroyed. (*On Thucydides* 9)

It is not self-evident, however, that in his zeal to record the summers and winters, the historian adopted an inferior style, or that he shared Dionysius's attitude regarding whole and continuous narrative. I shall therefore consider some advantages of following this untrodden path.³⁸

At issue is not the insertion of temporal markers per se but (at least in part) the arrangement by year as opposed to venue: Thucydides thus reports all the events of one season together, even if they occurred in different regions, instead of completing the account of a campaign in one area, even if it lasted more than a year. Dionysius illustrates the point with an extended critique of book 3, showing how the narrative jumps back and forth among the regions of Lesbos, Sparta, Plataea, Corcyra, Sicily, and Aetolia, frequently leaving a campaign unfinished and returning to it later. Chronology certainly has its part in this arrangement: the stories of the revolt of Lesbos, the fall of Plataea, and the first expedition to Sicily span two years and are all therefore told in two annual installments. It does not follow, however, that the annual scheme is absolute and necessarily overrides other considerations; for example, book 3 also includes the campaign in and around Aetolia that extended through a summer and a winter, and it is divided into two semi-annual, seasonal installments. Nor does it follow that Thucydides prefers a continuous narrative when not constrained by chronology; at the end of book 3, for example, he mentions in passing the arrival of a new Athenian general in southern Italy, but he could just as easily have brought this up later, without compromising his chronological organization, by referring to Pythodorus, "whom the Athenians had sent out to replace Laches the previous winter." We must therefore ask just what such an arrangement accomplishes. I argue that it puts the reader in the position of a participant following developments step by step, not yet knowing the outcome after the first year's machinations in Lesbos and likewise unaware, after a summer of maneuvers in Aetolia, Acharnania, and Locris, what would happen during the winter.³⁹

Related to arrangement is the issue of detail. Near the end of book 3, Thucydides reports some inconclusive engagements in Sicily, the purification of Delos, and the rather Pyrrhic victory of Demosthenes at Ambracia—any one of which could easily have been omitted if the goal were narrative clarity. The *History*, however, is full of minor incidents that seem to disrupt the flow of the narrative, as when the exploits of Brasidas in book 4, for example, are interrupted by a two-line notice that the Megarians recaptured their Long Walls in the same winter (4.109.1). Moreover, at the beginning of book 5, Thucydides tells how Cleon retook Torone, only to devote two lines to the

Boeotian capture of Panactum, two lines to Cleon's departure for Amphipolis, and about a page to developments in Sicily, before returning to Cleon. Such cumulative detail cannot be attributed to carelessness; I suggest instead that Thucydides refrains from streamlining his narrative or removing events that lack a belated significance because he wants to create the impression of events unfolding simultaneously in different parts of the Greek world and wants the reader to share the experience of not knowing which strands might prove significant, which inconsequential, and when.

In his *Letter to Pompey*, Dionysius repeats his criticism of Thucydides' arrangement, comparing the author unfavorably with Herodotus.

The result is that, whereas Thucydides has taken a single subject and divided the whole body into many parts, Herodotus has chosen a number of subjects which are in no way alike and has made them into one harmonious whole.
(trans. Usher, *Dionysius*, 381)

Critics of Dionysius might reasonably respond that creating a harmonious body from many disparate subjects is in fact a form of distortion and a good example of composition "more concerned with enticing the listener than with truth" (1.21.1), which Thucydides has explicitly rejected. To illustrate (less invidiously than Dionysius) the different strategies of the two historians, I now turn to an instance where Herodotus is confronted with separate subjects that are not alike: namely, the simultaneous movements of Xerxes' army by land and his navy by sea.

In his narration of Xerxes' advance toward Athens, Herodotus at first keeps his focus primarily on the land forces, until, at the end of book 7 and the beginning of book 8, his attention must shift to the navy at Sepias and back to the army at Thermopylae, then to the navy at Artemisium and back again to the army in Phocis. This method is most problematic when both strands of the story approach a climax: the Persian army has sacked Athens, and the Greek land forces are preparing their defenses at the Isthmus, while, at the same time, the Greek fleet has assembled at Salamis to discuss how to meet the Persian advance by sea. Herodotus here creates artful transitions between land and sea. After accentuating the importance of this moment with a catalog of Greek naval forces at Salamis (8.42–48), he reports that the Spartan Eurybiades wanted to move the fleet to the Isthmus, adding, "while the Peloponnesian generals were still deliberating, an Athenian man arrived with the news that the Persians had entered Attica and were setting fire to all of it" (8.50). This entrance of a messenger allows the narrator to shift focus

progressively from the views of the naval officers, to a new arrival in their midst, to the news he brings, and thus to a narrative of the capture of the Acropolis (8.51–55). The ensuing account of events on land is told from the historian's point of view and is followed by a new transition.

But the Greeks at Salamis, when what happened to the Athenian Acropolis was reported to them, were so disturbed that some of the generals did not wait for the matter to be decided but hurried on board and began hoisting sail to flee. (8.56)

By returning to the perspective of the messenger's audience, Herodotus frames events in Athens as offstage developments for the actors at Salamis, thus using a theatrical model to weave together two threads that Thucydides would probably have left separate.

Something similar follows the debate in which Themistocles urges the navy to make a stand at Salamis; after explaining that the opposing navies were prepared to fight the next morning, Herodotus observes:

But fear and dread came over the Greeks, especially those from the Peloponnese, because they were waiting at Salamis to fight a naval battle for the Athenians and would find themselves under siege if defeated and caught there, while the Persian infantry that very night was marching to the Peloponnese. (8.70.2–8.71.1)

By focalizing the Peloponnesians at Salamis, Herodotus is able to move seamlessly from the sailors' fears for themselves to their fears for their countrymen at the Isthmus, and this in turn allows for an artful transition to preparations on land: "Nevertheless everything possible had been contrived to prevent the Persians from entering by land" (8.71.1). Herodotus then present shock in late fifth-century greece describes in his own voice, and at some length, the army's preparations at the Isthmus, before returning to the navy.

Those at the Isthmus labored on like this, since they were racing for all they possessed and did not expect to get anything from the navy; those at Salamis, however, became afraid at hearing this, fearing less for themselves than for the Peloponnese. At first they quietly whispered to one another, marveling at Eurybiades' folly, but finally it broke out into the open, and a meeting took place. (8.74.1–2)

By focalizing the sailors' fears, this time in response to general reports rather than to a messenger, the historian is able to segue into further debate at Salamis and the ruse of Themistocles. It would therefore seem, to revise the comments of Dionysius, that whereas Thucydides allows discrete local events that might develop in different directions

to remain distinct, Herodotus weaves his separate strands together into a single overriding narrative.

Localized Explanations

Historians may express themselves through both the arrangement of events and their interpretations. Although it may be tempting to view Thucydides' localized narrative as relatively dry and annalistic (contrasting it, as John Finley does, with the more dramatic and interpretive speeches),⁴⁰ this assessment overlooks his constant—if idiosyncratic—authorial interventions. When rendering his opinions, Thucydides does so atomistically—that is, on discrete events in turn—and offers these opinions after the fact, thus requiring the reader to follow his account without the advantage of an overarching explanation that would lend both shape and direction to the narrative. I shall illustrate this technique with several examples and show how it differs from Herodotus's method.

Thucydides begins his account of the sixth year of the war by reporting that the Spartan army turned back before invading Attica because of several earthquakes (3.89), adding that there were tidal waves in Euboea and on the mainland opposite at around the same time. Mention of the tidal waves and the damage they caused then prompts him to offer an explanation.

This kind of thing is caused, I believe, where the earthquake is strongest, by the sea drawing away from shore and suddenly sweeping back again more violently, thus causing an inundation; without an earthquake I do not see how such a thing could happen. (3.89.5)

Immediately after this, Thucydides moves on to events elsewhere, using his formulaic expression “In the same summer...” to mark off a section of the narrative. There is, of course, nothing unusual in a Greek historian offering a rational explanation for natural phenomena; Herodotus, after all, speculated at some length about the origins of the Nile, but only as part of an extended discussion of Egyptian customs and geography that, in turn, was part of his ongoing interest in the peoples and places ruled by the Persians. What is distinctive in Thucydides, by contrast, is the localized explanation directed to events at hand: he offers an ad hoc theory or opinion and moves on.

Although earthquakes and tidal waves may seem peripheral to Thucydides' usual concern with military and economic power, he describes and rationalizes natural phenomena throughout the *History*. For example, he begins his account of the second year of the war by

noting that the plague first struck Athens during the Spartan invasion of Attica. This leads to his famous description of the disease and its consequences (2.47–54), after which he returns to relating military developments—the naval expedition under Pericles while the Spartans were in Attica, followed by a campaign in Thrace under Hagnon. Thucydides begins the latter episode by saying that Hagnon took over from Pericles the one hundred ships and four thousand hoplites that had attacked the Peloponnese, using them now against Potidaea, but that despite all their efforts, “they neither captured the city nor achieved anything else worthy of such a force” (2.58.2). Only after reporting on the expedition and its failure does he provide an explanation.

For here also the plague afflicted the Athenians, destroying the army, with the result that Athenian troops who were there before and who until then were healthy now caught the disease from Hagnon’s army. Phormio and his 1,600 men were no longer in the area of the Chalcidians, so Hagnon returned with his ships to Athens, having lost to the plague 1,050 hoplites out of 4,000 in about forty days. (2.58.2–3)

A historian more interested in weaving his narrative together would surely have begun with mention of the plague and its effects not just in Athens but overseas, allowing this primary reason for Hagnon’s failure to introduce an account of the failed offensive in Thrace. Instead, Thucydides reports events first, only afterward offering an explanation, even where a different arrangement would have produced a more integrated narrative. As a result, at the “atomic” level, individual events may (or may not) have corresponding explanations, without implying that they will share an overarching explanation on a larger scale.

This observation could be multiplied: whether his explanation is strategic (according to 2.86, the ostensible reason for the first expedition to Sicily was kinship with Leontini, but the actual reason was to cut off the grain supply) or political (according to 5.16, the peace in 421 was agreed to partly because the Spartan king thought it would silence his enemies) or moralizing (according to 4.108, the revolt of Athenian allies in Thrace was largely due to the human capacity for wishful thinking), it nevertheless comes after the fact and does not serve to connect one episode with another. A final example illustrates the surprising degree to which his explanations may be atomized. In his account of the first Spartan invasion of Attica, Thucydides takes pains to explain the surprisingly slow advance of Archidamas, for which the general was later criticized—or, more accurately, he explains two different things in this report. First, he states that Archidamas, on entering Attica, laid siege to the frontier

fort of Oenoe, which he failed to capture; he justifies this by suggesting that Archidamas thought the Athenians would come to terms when they saw the Peloponnesian army inside Attica (2.18). Thucydides then goes on to report that after laying waste Eleusis, Archidamas pitched camp at Acharnae and waited there; he explains this by suggesting that Archidamas believed it would either provoke the Athenians to fight or make it easier in the future to destroy their land (2.19–20). Instead of weaving his explanations into a connected account of the strategy (which might read, for instance, “Archidamas was initially cautious because..., but as he advanced, he tried more and more to force a battle”), he leaves them separate, accounting for single events but not for the invasion as a whole.

Herodotus’s account of the naval battle at Aphetæ illustrates an alternative method to Thucydidean atomizing. Instead of beginning by reporting events, Herodotus begins with motives and explanations: the Persians were eager to engage the smaller Greek fleet, but because they did not want a single ship to survive, they planned to block their escape by sending a squadron of ships around Euboea. Herodotus reports that a Persian squadron sailed off and the main fleet waited, but then he starts an apparent digression.

While they were making a review of the fleet, it so happened there was in the Persian army a man, Scyllias of Scione, the best diver of his day, who in the naval wreckage at Pelion saved much property for the Persians—and gained much for himself. This man Scyllias had apparently been thinking for some time of deserting to the Greeks. (8.8.1)

The story of this man’s exploits as a diver, as well as doubts that he could really swim ten miles underwater, finally lead to the fact that he provided the Greeks with information about the Persian navy and the squadron sailing around Euboea, all of which motivate the action that ensues—namely, that the Greeks, finding the squadron not yet at hand, decide to attack the larger Persian fleet. Whereas Thucydides would have reported ship movements first and supplied explanations afterward, Herodotus uses the calculations of the Persians and the information provided by Scyllias to lead the reader forward, in order to suggest that events have followed naturally from what preceded.

The atomizing quality of Thucydides’ narrative may mislead some readers to believe that he is reporting “just the facts,” since each new event or episode is separate from what precedes it. Yet the historian does not hesitate to append explanations and moralizing. One way of describing this is to say that his “famous reticence” applies to the direction of events as a whole but not to events taken separately; another is to observe that the resulting perspective is immediate or

present (observing discrete events as they occur) rather than detached (employing hindsight and thus taking in the larger trajectory of the war).

PRESENT ALTERNATIVES

Thucydides' narrative techniques thus require the reader to watch events as they unfold—a perspective reinforced by his diction. For example, he uses the participle παρῶν, “present,” twice as often as Herodotus, thus constantly drawing attention to the present moment or situation.⁴¹ Attention to the present, generally speaking, devalues the authority of the past and legitimates the contemporary world. The remainder of this chapter will explore these ideological implications in greater detail, beginning with events prior to the breaking of the truce.

Change of Mind

A telling difference we have seen between Herodotus and Thucydides is the contrast between the specious choice forced on Gyges and the Athenian assembly's ability both to choose a course of action and to change its mind. This possibility of wavering or changing one's mind recurs at crucial points in the *History*. The first of these points, the Athenian decision to enter into a defensive alliance with Corcyra, is the longest single episode before the outbreak of war and employs the historian's first pair of opposing speeches to reenact the first major policy decision reached by the assembly.

Thucydides emphasizes change of mind a second time during the Mytilenian debate, an important event in the story of Athenian foreign policy. After the rebel city was subdued, the Athenians decided, in their anger, to kill not only the captives but also all the adult men of Mytilene and to enslave the women and children (3.36.2); however, “on the next day they had a sudden change of mind, reckoning that they had reached a savage and excessive decision in destroying the whole city rather than those responsible” (3.36.4). The representatives from Mytilene and their Athenian supporters were able to persuade the authorities to reopen the issue, “because it was clear to them that most citizens wanted someone to let them deliberate again,” so “an assembly was called at once and new arguments were presented on both sides” (3.36.5–6). There follows the debate between Cleon and Diodotus that ends with an evenly divided vote to spare the inhabitants, leading to the dramatic race to overtake the ship carrying

the order of execution. In this important episode, Thucydides takes pains to show that, despite Cleon's talk of the tyranny of empire, imperial policy is not irrevocable; as Diodotus's argument makes clear, the city's interests must constantly be reevaluated, with the result that the exercise of power is as uncertain as the course of the narrative.

A third instance where Thucydides emphasizes change of mind involves the Sicilian expedition. The degree of support for this huge venture is underscored by describing Nicias's futile attempt to change the Athenians' minds. The assembly had voted to send sixty ships to Sicily, and when it met to make further arrangements for the expedition, Nicias, believing the Athenians had made the wrong decision, tried to dissuade them (6.8.4). When he realizes that he will not persuade them to vote down the enterprise, he takes a different tack, hoping that exaggerating the force required will make them alter their position (6.19.2); however, in a dramatic blow to his expectations, the people enthusiastically vote for a much larger expedition (6.24). As in the debate over Mytilene, the people have the authority to change their minds, and the course of events hangs in the balance as they deliberate. In this case, their failure to change shows how even a seasoned statesman may still underestimate the assembly's resolve.

Scholars have noted these points at which the assembly considers changing its mind, and they have discussed the constitutional issues involved (e.g., under what circumstances the assembly might revisit or revoke an earlier decision),⁴² but they have not, to my knowledge, pondered their narrative significance. At three pivotal points in Thucydides' *History*, his leading protagonist, the Athenian assembly, is prepared to change its mind,⁴³ thus giving unprecedented emphasis to the "presentness" of the narrative, to the sense that the course of events is open—neither determined by prior causes nor fixed in retrospect, but subject to the wills and sometimes whims of human agency. The parallels with Euripides are obvious: in both authors, change of mind indicates the undecidedness of the action, the ability of events and characters to surprise us; and in both, such a portrayal of the present is dramatic rather than mimetic, relying not on a faithful record of all details, however inconsequential, but on representative speeches that dramatize a moment of debate and uncertainty.

The assembly's change of mind is an emphatic instance of the undecided present, yet the historian's embedded speeches generate a succession of comparable, less pronounced examples. These speeches, with their arguments, exhortations, and bits of advice, show

participants as they deliberate a course of action. Marc Cogan remarks, “[p]olitical situations are irreducibly concrete and particular,” and “[t]he job of the historian is to recover and explain events precisely in their particularity.”⁴⁴ Thucydides’ speeches do not distill the historian’s universal lesson from concrete events,⁴⁵ but in representing the immediate demands of a specific situation, they provide “the embodiment of the context, the nexus of needs and possibilities,”⁴⁶ that participants must consider. If there is a liveliness and authenticity to the speeches, it is not so much because they provide immediate access to the historian’s thought⁴⁷ or (and here I differ with Cogan) allow us to recover an actual moment of crisis; rather, it is because they reenact the familiar and open-ended process of making strategic decisions.

Change and Changeability

Thucydides’ special emphasis on change of mind is part of his broader interest in historical change. His opening programmatic statement singles out change as the specific feature that sets this war apart: “for this was the greatest change to take place among the Hellenes, involving as it did the foreign world and so to speak most of mankind” (1.1.2). Kinesis—movement, change, or upheaval—is without doubt the index of this war’s importance, present shock in late fifth-century Greece as the historian spells out more fully at the end of his introduction, where he concludes that it surpassed all other wars, “for never were so many cities captured and made desolate, either by foreigners or by the warring sides (some also changed their inhabitants after capture), nor so many men exiled, nor so much slaughter both in war and in civil unrest” (1.23.1–2). Indeed, change is also a central theme of the whole work: change, migration, and instability in the “Archaeology” account for the weakness of early Greece and the lack of achievements comparable to those of the present. Conversely, stability and the absence of population change in Attica contributed to that region’s prosperity and abundant population (1.2). Furthermore, in Thucydides’ moralizing reflections on Corcyra, the extreme degree of change is largely responsible for the general shamelessness and opportunism that have arisen (3.82–84). Nevertheless, Thucydides is giving us neither a lesson here on the necessity of change nor an implicit model of progress or decline.⁴⁸ Herodotus, by contrast, virtually begins with a moralizing observation on change: “many things that once were great became small, and many great in my time were small before; but recognizing that human fortune never remains the same, I shall record both alike” (1.5.4). In a traditional vein, the earlier historian warns that human fortune is

subject to reversal, adding the less conventional notion that the small can likewise become great, the truth of which maxim is soon demonstrated by the story of Croesus.

In Thucydides, by contrast, there is no suggestion of a general pattern or rule of change. Stability, to be sure, is often preferable to change: constant migration kept other cities weak, while the stable population of Athens led to faster economic development, and the radical upheavals in Corcyra brought with them atrocities and depravity. But nowhere does Thucydides imply either that change itself is necessary or that its effect is necessarily detrimental.⁴⁹ Some early cities suffered from constant population changes, while others, including Athens, did not; in some cases, as in Corcyra, such changes can be equated with decline; in others, as in the rise of the Athenian Empire, it cannot. To revise the argument of Virginia Hunter in *Past and Process*, there are patterns and tendencies in the respective conduct of both people and poleis as well as in the overall course of human events; the historian makes use of these tendencies in organizing his narrative without ever suggesting that their course is inexorable or inevitable.⁵⁰ More far-reaching claims were certainly tempting, especially to Athenians who had witnessed the meteoric rise of their city's power and empire; could one not therefore conclude that the city's rise to preeminence was in some sense inevitable or that it somehow contained a lesson on the triumph of freedom? Thucydides explicitly rejects such notions. The Athenians, at the beginning of their debate with the Melians, say, "for our part, we will not use fine words to make a long and implausible speech that we rule justly because we destroyed the Persians, or that we are attacking you because we were injured" (5.89), adding that present considerations of power are more decisive than abiding notions of justice. The subject is explored more fully in the debate at Camarina, where the Athenian Euphemus responds to Hermocrates by defending the position of Athens but refuses to follow the Syracusan in appealing to honor and kinship. The gambit requires that, by invoking self-interest rather than honor or justice, Euphemus give up any claim that his city's rise to power was either right or necessary.

And we do not make fine speeches, saying that we should rule because we alone subdued the foreigner or that we took risks for their freedom, rather than for the freedom of all, ourselves included. No one can be faulted for making suitable arrangements for their own safety. So now, being present here for our own security, we see that the same things are in your interests also. (6.83.2)

Thucydides' Athenians, by rejecting a notion of civic progress or of Athenian Manifest Destiny,⁵¹ must therefore place their confidence not in eventual vindication by justice or history but in a careful

assessment of risks and benefits at the present moment.

Change and Ethics

These observations are negative in the sense that Thucydides stresses change and changeability in human events without implying that they inevitably lead to improvement or decline; in Thucydides, there is no Law of Change; change simply “happens.” In accordance with this view, his narrative highlights the importance of unexpected events, both for the worse, as in the plague at Athens, and for the better, as in Athenian good fortune at Pylos. As Lowell Edmunds points out in his study of these terms, the role of chance resists the attempts of intelligence and forethought to understand events fully or anticipate what is to come.⁵²

In another sense, however, change is positive: if change resists our desire for order or pattern, it is also the field where human qualities are best displayed. In the present moment, at which the future is unknowable, yet momentous decisions must still be made, the exemplary human qualities of Pericles and of Athens are put to the test. It is in the arena of the present, as the Corinthians remind the Spartans, that the people of Athens excel, and in urging Sparta to declare war, a Corinthian speaker finds fault with the Spartans (1.70.1), pointing out how different they are from the Athenians.

They [the Athenians] are innovative, quick to form a plan, and quick to put into action whatever they decide; but you tend to preserve what you have and not reach decisions, and in action fail to complete what is necessary. They are daring beyond their strength and take risks against their judgment, and in dire situations are confident; your way is to do less than your strength and, in secure situations, to mistrust your judgment and suppose that you will never escape from difficulties. While you delay, they never hesitate, and while you more than anyone stay at home, they are always abroad; when away, they expect to gain, while you expect by any move to harm what you have... . If they fail in anything, they make up the deficit by setting their sights on other things; they alone hope for what they plan and possess it at the same time, by making a swift assault on what they want. (1.70.2–7)

Hence, the Spartans mistrust change and have a hard time adapting to it, while the Athenians embrace it with a vengeance, not only adapting immediately to present circumstances, but also anticipating further changes and opportunities.

Indeed, war is the arena of change par excellence, and the Corinthians advocate the Athenian approach, noting in a subsequent speech that one cannot foresee what strategies will be required, since “war does not at all proceed in a manner agreed upon, but by itself

contrives all sorts of response to chance events” (1.122.1). This ability to embrace and capitalize on the present moment is a hallmark of the Athenians in matters great and small. After the Battle of Plataea and the recall of Pausanias, for example, it was Athenian readiness to exploit the situation that would lead to the Delian league and Athenian hegemony, and after a naval defeat by the Peloponnesians, it was the Athenian ability to improvise that allowed them to turn the tables on their enemies: as Thucydides reports, a merchant ship happened (ἔτυχε) to be anchored offshore, and by sailing around it first, a lone Athenian ship sank its pursuer; this was so unexpected and surprising to the Peloponnesians that it threw them into a panic, and the Athenians were able to turn defeat into victory (2.91–92). Alcibiades appeals to this same ethical disposition in arguing for the expedition against Sicily: “This is how we gained our empire, we and all who have ruled, eagerly coming to the aid of those who ask for help, Greek or foreigner, since if we all remained at rest or decided by tribe who to help, we would add little to our empire and instead risk losing it. You don’t just fend off a greater power when it attacks, but act first so it cannot attack” (6.18.2). The Athenians must realize, he continues, “that the city, like anything else, will wear itself out if it remains at rest, and its skill in all things will grow old, but in conflict it will always gain experience and grow more accustomed at fending others off not in word but in action” (6.18.6). When the Sicilians find that they need to fend off the greater power of Athens, Hermocrates takes a page from the Corinthian book, urging the allies to rouse themselves from their passive ways and seize the moment as the Athenians would do, by going out and immediately challenging them (6.34.4).

This Athenian ethical attitude, this active (we might say proactive) engagement with the present,⁵³ involves a certain degree of paradox (as we shall soon see), yet it also points the way out of a scholarly impasse. Against the nineteenth century’s fascination with Thucydides as a rational and scientific historian, most twentieth-century scholars have emphasized the status of his work as a literary composition that uses traditional mythical, literary, and ideological models⁵⁴—a point of view that risks losing sight of Thucydides’ critical attention to the course of events. Several studies have sought to synthesize the two approaches: Martin Ostwald has argued in *ΑΝΑΓΚΗ in Thucydides* that there is a tragic contrast between the search for historical necessity, or ἀνάγκαι, and the world of traditional morality; Edmunds has maintained in *Chance and Intelligence* that there is a pathetic contrast between the dream of a world governed by intelligence, or γνῶμη, and the recognition of the

role of chance; Simon Hornblower has argued in *A Commentary on Thucydides* that there is a systematic contrast between Thucydides' competing programs as "objective" and "subjective" historian; and Clifford Orwin has claimed in *The Humanity of Thucydides* that there is an all-too-human conflict between rational necessity and moral justice. Such approaches, however, carry a real danger of reifying an internal tension in Thucydides' history: it is one thing to describe unresolved contradictions and quite another to assume that these are somehow the engine driving the historian's project. An alternative approach that, to my mind, is more suited to Thucydides' narrative is to foreground complexity; as Cogan observes in *The Human Thing*, the deliberative situations Thucydides describes are complex, particular moments at which conflicting interests and actions, both foreseeable and unanticipated, converge. If Thucydides describes situations in which human intelligence cannot foresee the outcome or in which self-interest cannot fully determine human decisions, this may follow less from a notion of competing principles at work in the world than from a general interest in the present in all its complexity. Yet to assume, as Cogan does, that the historian provides a transparent window on the true complexity of actual events is to overlook the textuality of his narrative. What gives this narrative its power is that it creates complex and uncertain moments of deliberation that, precisely as narrative, mimic the uncertainty and openendedness of our present experience.

Character, Situation, Ideology

The Athenians' attitude toward change has interesting implications. It stands in striking contrast to that of the Spartans, who are more cautious and less flexible. After the Athenians at Pylos captured nearly three hundred Spartan soldiers, including many officers, the Spartans warn them not to make the mistake of those who "always strive in the hope of more, because of their present unexpected good fortune," explaining that "those affected by most changes of both kinds rightly mistrust their good fortune" (4.17.4–5). Mistrust of change is thus in one sense mistrust of the future, a traditional suspicion that present wealth or good fortune will not (as Solon warns Croesus in Herodotus) last into the future. Yet the Spartan mistrust of change, as Thucydides represents it, is in another sense a mistrust of the present, a reluctance to rely on the present in action and deliberation. "It is not reasonable," the Spartans warn the Athenians, "that you, because of your city's present strength and possessions, should expect that chance will always be with you" (4.18.3), suggesting that their present advantage in holding Spartan prisoners is therefore deceptive. War, as

the arena of change, they argue, requires not quick adaptation to the present but extreme caution: sensible men “realize that war does not allow you to manage the part you want, but as your chances dictate” (4.18.4). The Spartans assume that the Athenians will agree and will accept peace to avoid the hazards of an uncertain present, but they are wrong; the Athenians, “since they held the men on the island, considered a treaty was at hand whenever they wanted to make one with them, and they were striving for more” (4.21). There is a paradox here: the present moment is full of uncertainty and danger, and the Athenian readiness to take the plunge and make the most of this situation is an important source of their success,⁵⁵ yet the ethical character that welcomes fickle situations must itself be constant and unwavering.

In the events leading up to the outbreak of hostilities, after the Spartans send their ultimatum and war is all but certain, Pericles must persuade the Athenians not to waver in their resolve.

I always have the same mind, Athenians—not to yield to the Peloponnesians, though I know that men do not agree to wage war and actually do it with the same eagerness and that they change their minds in response to misfortune. But I see that I must now give the same and similar advice, and I expect that if the road gets rough, those who agree will support our common resolve (if they properly claim intelligence). For it is a fact that chance events proceed as blindly as the plans of men, and so when events contradict our expectations, we are accustomed to blame chance. (1.140.1)

In the face of chance and uncertainty, Pericles exhorts the Athenians to a Spartan steadiness and resolve; but his resolve, unlike that of the Spartans, intends to exploit or master the present. An even more daunting and unnerving situation follows the second Spartan invasion and the outbreak of the plague, when the Athenians, as Thucydides reports, upon seeing their land destroyed, blamed Pericles for persuading them to go to war. Pericles, seeing them distressed at the present situation (2.59), then called an assembly to encourage and placate them. Although the Athenians feel themselves to be in *aporia*, or helplessness (2.59.2), Pericles nevertheless reminds them that they have choices to make; if peace is not an option, he says, and “if it is necessary either to yield quickly to others and obey them or take chances and prevail, I would blame the man who flees danger more than the one who stands up to it” (2.61.1). Thus where the Spartans seek to evade the vagaries of the present, the Athenians have a harder task. In a sympathetic diagnosis worthy of Antiphon, Pericles explains:

I am the same [καὶ ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ αὐτός εἰμι] and do not give way, but you are changing since it turns out that you accepted my advice while unharmed but repent when you suffer misfortune. In your weakness of heart my argument

does not meet with approval, since each person can see the pain involved but the benefits are not yet clear for all to see. Now that a mighty change has fallen on you from nowhere, your resolve in carrying out your plans falters. When something happens present shock in late fifth-century greece suddenly and unexpectedly and against all expectation, it takes away one's dignity—which has happened to you, because of the plague in addition to everything else. Nevertheless, living in a mighty city and raised with a character worthy of her, you must be willing to withstand even the mightiest disasters, and not do away with your good reputation. (2.61.2–3)

To say that Pericles combines an Athenian willingness to engage with the fickle present with a Spartan resolve would be misleading, since this former general does not really combine Athenian and Spartan values, nor is the steadiness of his character comparable to Spartan rigidity. As Thucydides presents it, the typically Athenian engagement with the present moment requires a paradoxically steady and determined, but not inflexible, character. One can best exploit the present by looking beyond it to future objectives and past purposes.

The difference between steadiness and stubbornness, as between adaptability and fickleness, is crucial, as the example of Cleon makes clear. During the Mytilenean debate, Cleon uses arguments and language quite similar to Pericles', but with entirely different ethical implications. Cleon begins, as Pericles did, by criticizing the assembly's change of heart (3.37.1), yet he goes on to praise not an ethical steadiness of purpose but universal inflexibility: he maintains that the worst thing of all for an imperial power is that decisions not remain fixed; that bad laws that do not change are better than good ones not always in effect; and that simplemindedness is better than cleverness (3.37.3). The fickle assembly has let itself be swayed by clever speakers, but Cleon's will, like Pericles', has not changed: he proclaims, "I am the same in my resolve" (ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ὁ αὐτός εἰμι τῇ γνώμῃ, 3.38.1). Where Pericles understands and sympathizes with the Athenians' despair, Cleon castigates their fascination with clever and novel arguments, calling them slaves of everything that is striking (3.38.5) and faulting them for "seeking, as it were, something other than where we live, yet not paying enough attention to the present, overcome by the pleasure of listening, and more like an audience of Sophists than counselors for the city" (3.38.7). Where Pericles turns the attention of the downhearted Athenians to past decisions and future prospects, Cleon does not; Diodotus has already staked out his argument based on looking ahead to the future interests of the city (3.44.3), and Cleon settles instead for defending a present decision at all costs.

In either case, the present reveals its limitations. The democratic assembly in Thucydides is a collective persona immersed in the present, encouraged or dejected as events develop from moment to moment and swayed one way or the other by the arguments it hears. Since Pericles was able to check these emotional swings, Thucydides concludes that the city “was in name a democracy but was in fact rule by the leading man” (2.65.9); and suspecting that the assembly will change its mind about Mytilene, Cleon begins by stating, “I recognized often before this that a democracy cannot rule others” (3.37.1). In a full democracy, the state is nothing other than the people in assembly—a body with the advantage of being able to react quickly, change its mind, and seize whatever advantage the present may offer—yet for precisely this reason, it has notable weaknesses: as the collective assembly, it cannot remain committed to a long-term goal as can an individual, such as Pericles. In fact, during the first Peloponnesian invasion of Attica, Pericles made a point of calling no assemblies of the people, suspecting that in their alarm at the closeness of the enemy, they might lose their resolve to wage a war of attrition (2.22). Nor can the collective body, being easily swayed by the present moment’s novel or striking arguments, uphold a prior decision with Cleon’s stubborn tenacity.

Thucydides’ narrative is therefore both formally and ideologically open. It is formally open in that it describes an undetermined present moment whose outcome is not yet given: some features that contribute to this openness (the capacity of events to surprise and of agents to change their minds) have analogues in Euripides; others (atomized narration and explanation) are peculiar to Thucydides. The historian’s narrative is ideologically open in that it portrays a present that is directed or determined neither by the authority of the past nor by an imperial destiny; traditional heroic values and progressive claims to moral superiority are both rejected.⁵⁶ It is also open inasmuch as it fails to prescribe how to navigate the uncertain waters of the present. Implicit in the “ironic” interpretations of Kitto and Morrison is a claim that Thucydides teaches his reader to escape those waters by imparting the wise perspective of the poet or the shrewd understanding of an elder statesman. There are indeed patterns the author wants us to see and lessons he wants us to learn, but for those who reflect on the central question of political action—a question framed in the quintessentially Athenian sphere of public deliberation—he offers no clear answer. Must Athenians wait for another Pericles to lead the demos? Should they try to change the constitution to place leadership in the hands of the few? Thucydides seems to have little confidence in either proposition, and although he is aware of

democracy's faults, he nevertheless nowhere suggests that democratic procedure necessarily leads to errors in policy.⁵⁷ Through his sustained attention to a present moment embedded in local circumstances and conditioned by both past and future, Thucydides shows that we cannot rely on the rigid values of any persuasion.

CHAPTER 5

The Heuristic Present

MEDICAL SCIENCE

IN THE PRECEDING chapters, I have argued that new ways of representing time and temporality emerged in the late fifth century, shifting attention from the past to the present and particularly to complex situations as these are experienced. Especially detailed versions of this new perspective are furnished by the works of Euripides and Thucydides that narrate—that is, represent continuously through time—the choices faced by both individuals and communities. In the present chapter, I shall broaden this inquiry to consider accounts of human society as a whole, allowing us to see analogous changes in the representation of time from the smallest to the largest scale. In such cases, the accounts we have are much shorter than the extended narratives examined in previous chapters (consisting of passages embedded in larger works), and they do not comprise a formal literary genre, such as tragedy or historiography; nevertheless, since they drew on discussions of the origins and development of culture that were common in the fifth century, we may indeed speak of a discourse on cultural origins that likewise shifted its attention from the past to the present.¹ Because the relative brevity of these accounts precludes studying narrative techniques as closely as in previous chapters, I shall instead focus on the significant details that distinguish their views of change through time, arguing that our longest and most important passage, a section of the Hippocratic treatise *Ancient Medicine*, offers the most sophisticated understanding of how social groups develop new ideas and practices.²

EARLY RECONSTRUCTIONS

The earliest surviving Greek account of cultural origins is a speech by the protagonist of Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, a tragedy probably composed before the middle of the fifth century.³ In the course of the play, the Titan Prometheus, who has been chained to a rock as punishment for giving fire to mortals, takes credit for all the cultural institutions that distinguish humans from animals (*Prometheus* 436–

506). He claims to have taught them how to build houses from bricks and wood; how to measure seasons and harvests by the settings of stars; how to record words in writing, domesticate animals, build ships, cure disease, read omens, perform sacrifices, and extract metals from the earth. "Understand it all in a single phrase," he concludes, "all skills for mortals come from Prometheus" (505–6). What does this passage tell us about change in human society?

Titanic Intervention

Prometheus's speech gives a nearly exhaustive account of the skills and technologies humans have acquired, contrasting their prior helplessness with their subsequent, almost miraculous abilities to cure disease and read the will of the gods. Yet if we consider not the number of skills but the mechanism of change, we find the latter simple and static: at some time earlier, humans were foolish and blind and lived like flimsy ants (452–53), then somehow (he does not explain how) Prometheus intervened to give them intelligence and skills. He observes: "originally witless, I made them intelligent and effective in thought" (443–44); "in need of medicine they would wither away, until I showed them mixtures of soothing remedies with which they ward off all diseases" (480–83). In this account, there is no sense of development over time or of any struggle in acquiring new skills; rather than a gradual process of change, we have a sudden moment of transformation as Titanic intervention turned witless humans into intelligent and effective beings.

Noteworthy in Aeschylus is not so much the manner of change, however superhuman and atemporal, as the fact of change itself, especially in contrast to Hesiod, whose much earlier story of the five races in *Works and Days* (109–201) suggests an overall pattern of decline within which no individual race can change. According to Hesiod, each change in the human condition requires nothing less than the destruction of one race and the creation of another: the golden race is covered in earth and replaced by that of silver; Zeus covers the silver race and creates one of bronze; the men of bronze die out and are replaced by the heroes or demigods, and a similar fate seems to await the race of iron, whose evils are so numerous and so great that Hesiod claims "Zeus will destroy this race of mortals as well when they are gray-haired at birth" (180–81).

A goal of *Works and Days* is to explain how best to deal with the harsh conditions of human life that the myth of five races represents as unalterable; only if Hesiod had been born to an earlier or later race

could things have been different than they are. By contrast, the Titan Prometheus gave existing humans an arsenal of skills that immediately altered their condition, raising them from the level of flimsy ants who, “like shapes in dreams, confused everything at random as long as they lived” (448–50), to beings capable of building houses, working the land in season, and improving their lot through medicine and augury. Thus, in Aeschylus, the human condition is subject to change, while in Hesiod it is merely subject to periodic destruction. More important, in Aeschylus, the mechanism of change—a momentous (and mysterious) intervention by the son of Iapetos—is external to humans and situated in the past.

Change and Progress

Even though the human condition is subject to change in *Prometheus* but not in *Works and Days*, this does not imply a simple opposition. On the one hand, Hesiod’s *Works and Days* does not banish change entirely. Indeed, there is the succession of the races from gold to iron; and within the present race of iron, there is short-term change or periodicity, insofar as human life is bound up with the cycles of the seasons, the movements of the stars, and the rhythms of agricultural life, and there is also long-term development or unfolding, insofar as the nature of these men of iron will become more and more manifest until children are born with gray hair and Shame leaves the earth (181, 199–200).⁴ On the other hand, the speech of Prometheus by no means anticipates the modern, Western notion of progress as a large-scale development that is for the better and somehow inevitable.⁵ Let us therefore look more closely at the mechanisms of change in both Hesiod and Aeschylus.

Hesiod’s succession of races from gold to iron is broadly comparable to the succession of divine generations in *Theogony*: in both cases, change involves replacement, ending with the present race of iron in one and the present generation of Olympians in the other. Both imply that change is no longer possible and that the future can bring nothing new. *Theogony* describes how Zeus prevented the birth of a son who might overthrow and succeed him and overcame all challengers, such as Typhoeus; *Works and Days* conveys the impossible wish to have been born later than the race of iron (175), with its unending grief and pain (200–201). In *Theogony*, the manner of succession is strictly materialistic, in that one generation follows another by sexual union and procreation, but the mechanism varies in *Works and Days*. Hesiod records that the first race of men was created by the gods in the time of Kronos, the second by unspecified gods, and

the third, fourth, and fifth by Zeus. But in no case are we told why they were created. As for their destruction, the second was covered by Zeus because its people would not honor the gods, and those of the third destroyed one another in their violence. We are not told how or why the first and fourth races came to an end. The fifth, we are informed, will eventually be destroyed by Zeus for its wickedness. Humans, in other words, owe their existence to a greater power, and while wickedness or violence may contribute to their demise, there is no further natural or intelligible process at play in the succession of generations.

In *Prometheus*, the potential contrast between an unchanging human condition and a larger succession of generations is preempted. Zeus was about to destroy the human race and create an entirely new one (232–33), when Prometheus intervened, somehow preventing it from being destroyed (234–36), and improved its lot in two ways: he gave humans “blind hopes,” to make them oblivious to their own mortality (248–50), and he gave them fire (254). According to this revision of Hesiod, the human condition did indeed change through the interventions of the Titan Prometheus, who goes on to suggest an interesting mechanism for change. Although he describes hope in largely negative terms, as an anodyne that allows humans to avoid contemplating their ultimate doom, he also implies that by releasing humans from the fear of death, hope lets them strive for improvement.

PROM: I established in them blind hopes.

CHORUS: Great is the benefit you granted humans.

PROM: I also provided them with fire.

CHORUS: Do short-lived creatures really have flaming fire?

PROM: And from it they will discover many skills. (250–54)

Hope is presumably a great source of help (μέγ' ὠφέλημα) because it complements fire: it encourages mortals to better their lot, while fire gives them a means to do so. In other words, although he will later state that he is the sole author of mortal skills, Prometheus here implies that he not only improved the human condition but also enabled human beings to continue their own progress. This glimmer of confidence in human faculties anticipates its fuller expression in Sophocles.

Periclean Achievements

The most famous account of human development, Sophocles' "Ode to Man," is also the first to suggest a naturalistic cause for human progress.⁶ In Sophocles' *Antigone*, Creon has heard that someone (or something) has again dared to scatter earth on the body of Polyneices, and the chorus members then sing the "Ode to Man," reflecting on human achievements: "many things are astounding," they begin, "but none more astounding than humankind" (332–33). They continue with a catalog of human skills—sea-faring, tilling the earth, hunting and fishing—all performed by "very skillful man" (347). The catalog emphasizes human superiority to the animals: the birds humans hunt are weak in thought (342), and humans rule domesticated animals by contrivances and fasten them with the yoke (347–52). The first half of the ode does not explain how humans acquired these astounding skills—it simply describes these skills as if Aeschylus's Prometheus had just finished granting his gifts. Only in the second half does the ode go on to suggest a mechanism.

And speech, and thought like
the wind, and impulses
that order towns, these he taught himself and how
to avoid harsh outdoor frosts and
the shafts of evil rain—
always resourceful. Whatever the future brings,
he faces it resourcefully. (353–61)

This human ability to adapt and acquire new skills is expressed in the Greek both by the unusual reflexive middle ἐδιδάξατο ("he taught himself," 356) and by the repetition in asyndeton of παντόπορος ἄπορος ἐπ' οὐδέν ("resourceful in everything; resourceless at nothing" 360). In Aeschylus, the Titan gave humans a whole cornucopia of skills at one time; in Sophocles, humans somehow have a single all-encompassing talent—the ability to discover skills on their own. This one talent not only explains all past developments but will suffice for whatever contingencies the future may bring. We are not told the details of this process of discovery (how, for example, humans taught themselves speech or "thought like the wind"), but we are told that it is an ongoing process (humans deal with individual difficulties as they arise) that is generally predictable (we do not know how each difficulty will be resolved, but we do know that it will be resolved).

A fragment of the earlier philosopher-poet Xenophanes offers an

intriguing contrast to Sophocles' "Ode to Man." The two lines we have of this fragment, probably written more than a generation before *Antigone*, are generally taken as the first statement of a belief in progress:⁷ "No, gods did not reveal all things to mortals from the beginning, but as they search they find in time something better" (B18 D-K). The philosopher thus rejects the kind of sweeping intervention celebrated in *Prometheus*, making it clear that improvement comes instead, as in Sophocles, through human agency making discoveries over time. Yet unlike Sophocles, Xenophanes does not suggest that human resourcefulness can overcome all obstacles, nor does he claim that discovery is a continuous or predictable process. Such a view of human agency agrees with Xenophanes' emphasis elsewhere on the limits of human knowledge: "no man knows clearly, nor will any man know, about the gods and all that I speak of; even if someone happened to describe things just as they are, he still does not know them. Appearance is crafted for all" (B34 D-K).

While Xenophanes places greater limits on human agency, Sophocles does admit two important limitations to human resourcefulness. The first of these is natural and absolute: "from death alone," the "Ode to Man" continues, "he will get no escape, but from unmanageable diseases he has devised his escapes" (361–64). This implies that humans can surmount every obstacle except for the fact that they are mortal and will die. The second limitation is moral and religious: "with an ability to contrive skills that is clever beyond belief, [humankind] moves now toward evil, now toward good" (365–67). The ode explains that those who respect the laws of earth and gods will prosper, while those who dare to entertain evil will not (368–71). These generalizing morals give no specific illustration, and none is needed: the human talent for discovering new skills is so astounding that those who possess it risk crossing a religious boundary into wrong or evil, just as today, for instance, we risk crossing over into the rash or immoral use of gene technologies. An awareness of moral limits, however, does not mean that inventiveness is wrong; it simply means, for Sophocles' audience as for us today, that this remarkable human talent carries with it a heavy burden of responsibility. Nor does it mean that the course of development is uncertain or unpredictable: Sophocles cannot predict whether human inventiveness will at some point hold itself back for moral reasons, but he expresses no doubt that the discovery of new skills will otherwise continue indefinitely.

In Sophocles' "Ode to Man," there is not only a new emphasis on the changeable human condition but also a shift from the past intervention of Prometheus to a human talent that poses a present,

moral dilemma. This shift is roughly analogous to the general shift from past to present that I have noted elsewhere in this book. I shall here consider some further examples of this general shift before turning to one that directly confronts present uncertainties.

The confidence in human talents voiced by the “Ode to Man” was widespread in the middle of the fifth century—for example, in the use of civic chronology to reorganize history. Even more ambitious was the creation of a new kind of city: after Sybaris in southern Italy was destroyed, the site was resettled in 443 under the leadership of Pericles and renamed Thurii, but rather than draw members from a single city—from the old Sybaris or from a new colonizing city—this Panhellenic foundation drew on Athenians, Sybarites, and Peloponnesians, as well as others. Thurii’s layout was regular and geometrical, thanks to the famous town planner Hippodamus of Miletus, while the involvement of other leading intellectuals, such as Herodotus of Halicarnassus and Euthydemus and Dionysodorus of Chios, indicates the excitement generated by this project; additionally, the report that Protagoras of Abdera was charged with designing its laws confirms that this was not just a new settlement but a new kind of polis altogether.⁸

It is not surprising that those prepared to improve society to this degree should attribute a comparable capacity to earlier peoples, and we might reasonably expect to find accounts of early cultural development that are more complete than the one embedded in *Antigone*. A prime candidate would be the treatise *On the Original Condition of the World* by Protagoras. However, since we possess nothing of this work, we must make do with a passage in Plato’s *Protagoras* wherein the famous Sophist describes the primitive condition of humankind, explaining at some length how humans acquired the capacity to form cities. Unfortunately, we cannot know to what extent this speech is faithful to Protagoras’s actual views or to what extent it constitutes Platonic embellishment;⁹ moreover, what we have primarily addresses Plato’s question of whether knowledge can be taught. Protagoras begins by describing the creation of humankind, explaining how Epimetheus, in doling out powers to all the animals, inadvertently left humans defenseless; to help humans survive, Prometheus stole fire from Hephaestus and crafts from Athena (*Protagoras* 320d–321e). The story thus answers the question raised in Aeschylus of why humans were so physically weak and defenseless; at the same time, it is an allegory relying on mythical characters. When Plato’s Protagoras gives humans wisdom in crafts (321d), this recalls the resourcefulness described by Sophocles, for it is what likewise allows humans to keep themselves alive (321e), as “they quickly

fashioned speech and names with this skill and invented houses and clothing and shoes and bedding and foods from the earth” (322a).

The next stage in this story, however, explains that, for all their inventiveness, humans could not form communities but instead fought and scattered, until Zeus sent Hermes to endow all people with respect and justice.

Thus equipped [with houses, clothing, etc.], humans at first lived scattered, and there were no cities. Therefore they were destroyed by wild animals, which were much more powerful, and while their technical skill was enough to provide them nourishment, it did not help in battling animals (they did not yet have political skill, of which battle is a part). They kept trying to gather together and preserve themselves by founding cities, but when they gathered, they injured one another since they had no political skill; as a result they scattered again and were destroyed. (322a–b)

While it is tempting to see this as a realistic account of cultural development in which improvements are countered by a major setback, it is far from clear that Plato intends to describe a historical sequence. Protagoras, or at least Plato’s version of Protagoras, probably does not mean that Zeus and Hermes literally intervened to endow humans with respect and justice; rather, he seems to be using the gods to make a philosophical point about the universal capacity for civic excellence and, hence, its teachability. The story of failure is thus a rhetorical thought experiment: “imagine what the human condition would be like without the civic qualities of respect and justice,” Plato’s Protagoras seems to say, continuing “It would be impossible for humans to form cities or to live together in communities without harming one another. It follows that somehow—let us say by the agency of Zeus and Hermes—all humans must be able to learn or develop these qualities.”¹⁰ Therefore, when Plato’s Sophist says in passing that humans invented houses and clothing and shoes and bedding and foods from the earth, it is probable, though not provable, that this reflects Protagoras’s own view that humans are capable of continual self-improvement. It is also possible that we have a rough similarity between Sophocles, who combines a talent for discovery with a present moral dilemma, and Protagoras, who combines ongoing practical discoveries with the challenge of learning justice.

Revisions and Complications

The cultural histories embedded in Sophocles and Plato involve what we might call a flattened, or unvarying, model of time. In Hesiod, the human condition is fixed and changes only after one race has been

destroyed and is replaced by another; in Aeschylus, it is subject to change only at that single moment when the Titan transforms it. In Sophocles and Plato, by contrast, the human condition continually changes as new skills are invented; in that sense, it is immersed in time. Yet in this conception, time is little more than a medium in which human nature can unfold and realize its potential.¹¹ Significant here is the capacity of humans to invent new skills—a capacity that in itself does not change: over time, new skills are found, giving people ever greater control of their environment, but there are no significant moments at which the capacity for invention either fails or suddenly is enhanced. Time becomes a significant factor in this sense only at that moment about which Sophocles warns, when human skills may exceed their proper bounds and mortals must decide whether they will renounce their astounding inventions.

While it is tempting to assume that the Sophoclean model reflects a prevailing ideology and that the ever-upward trajectory of human discoveries agrees with a Periclean confidence in the powers of the Athenian demos, other texts complicate this picture with more variable temporal schemes. One important text is a speech by the legendary criminal Sisyphus that describes the origins of human culture and the development of legal practices.

There was a time when the life of humans was chaotic

and bestial and ruled by force,

when there was neither reward for the good

nor punishment for the bad.

Then, it seems to me, men established

laws to punish, so justice would rule

... and keep violence enslaved;

if someone did wrong he paid the penalty.

(1–8, Critias F19 *TrGF* = B25 D-K)

While it remains contested whether this fragment was written by Euripides or Critias and whether it belonged to a tragedy or a satyr play,¹² its embedded story is, at least initially, similar to the one in Sophocles in that humans are able to master their circumstances by establishing laws (5–6). However, progress here turns out to be not so simple, and discoveries do not always live up to their promise.

Then, since the laws prevented them from openly
doing deeds of violence
and they would do them secretly, it seems to me
some shrewd, wise-minded man first
invented for mortals fear of the gods, so
bad men would have something to fear if they act
or speak or think, even secretly. (9–15)

According to Sisyphus, the failure of legal institutions is thus corrected by the invention of religious beliefs and practices, the latter depending on a single man, shrewd and wise of mind (12). Sisyphus goes on to explain how the qualities of these invented gods serve the wise man's purpose: their supposed superhuman powers let them know whether humans are doing wrong and punish them when they are (16–26).

In Sisyphus's speech, the natural inventiveness of humans in establishing laws recapitulates the driving force of change in *Antigone* and *Protagoras*, and even though Sisyphus' intervention of a clever man in creating religious beliefs recalls Prometheus's Titanic intervention, his speech as a whole challenges prior models in three ways. First, the flat, or unvarying, model no longer holds: the talent for discovery does indeed lift humans from an original bestial state, but the laws fail to work as intended, and society slips back toward the rule of force. Second, the answer comes from a totally different quarter, not the talents of people in general, but the shrewd mind of one man in particular; further development thus requires an additional mechanism of change. Third, fraud and deception succeed where invention fails, so the new mechanism brings with it a revised evaluation of cultural change: the optimistic and progressive model suggested by the chorus of Sophocles is upstaged by a sophisticated and cynical one in which, paradoxically, humans survive only by being bamboozled.

Another account of the early changes in human society is fuller than the ones I have examined so far and offers a different challenge to the Sophoclean model. Thucydides, in his "Archaeology" (1.2–18), describes the increasing power, prosperity, and naval resources of the Greek city-states; as I noted in [chapter 4](#), his primary purpose in doing so is to demonstrate that the present conflict is greater and more important than all previous ones, and his focus is therefore narrower, giving not a general account of the human condition but a particular

account of the human capacity to wage war.¹³ The historian's narrative follows an upward trajectory from primitive times to the highly developed resources and techniques available during the Peloponnesian War: in ancient times, the population was not stable, and there were no trade or safe travel, no resources beyond the bare essentials, no agriculture or fortifications or cities of any size (1.2.1–3); after the Persian Wars, by contrast, the Athenians and Lacedaemonians were the most powerful, one prevailing by land and the other by sea, although because of the contributions of its allies, Athens now had greater resources for war than the two sides combined had ever held (1.18–19). Whereas primitive and civilized states are separated in Aeschylus only by the Titan's intervention and in Sophocles by an unvarying process of innovation, Thucydides devotes sixteen ensuing chapters to the complex story of change and development.

Thucydides' long embedded narrative includes a wealth of incidents and details, from the earliest period of instability and piracy down to the Persian invasions, and it is strongly revisionist, consistently emphasizing material causes and explanations. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Protagoras all describe improvements that are moral in the sense that they enhance the state of humankind, raising it up from a bestial condition to one approaching the divine; and two of these men make use of Prometheus, the mythical benefactor of humankind. Thucydides, by contrast, tells a story that is profoundly secular and amoral—a story of increasing resources for waging war. Furthermore, his account is revisionist even in its underlying complexity: for Sophocles, human nature is sufficient to account for continued innovations and improvements in the human condition; for Thucydides, no single principle, no overarching cause—not even greed or self-interest—can account for developments in military resources.

Significantly, it is hard to extract from the “Archaeology” even an implicit cause. As scholars have correctly noted, this embedded narrative neither makes improvement seem inevitable¹⁴ nor follows any consistent pattern. This is partly because the trajectory of events it recounts is neither simple nor linear: while it begins with a complete lack of resources in earliest times and ends with unprecedented power at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, there are downturns and complications along the way. “Different cities in different ways encountered obstacles to improvement,” Thucydides observes, giving the example of the Ionians checked by Persian power (1.16). He might have added that different cities make progress at different times, since the Corinthians were the first to develop a navy, followed later by the Ionians (1.13) and only much later by the Athenians (1.18), who

nevertheless achieved stability long before the other groups (1.2). In Thucydides' discussion, not only does progress vary from place to place, but its presence on one front may be the cause of problems on another: in early times, for example, as life became settled enough for seafaring to begin, this also made it possible for piracy to erupt (1.5); furthermore, as the Cretan king Minos gained enough power to remove the pirates and promote prosperity, those he ruled had to accept servitude as the price for their new wealth (1.8). Similarly, Thucydides observes that as tyrannies arose in Greece, allowing revenues to increase and fleets to be built (1.13), the tyrants' self-interest prevented these improvements from helping the city as a whole (1.17). Finally, he notes that overall conditions may actually worsen as they did after the Trojan War, when the majority of cities were afflicted by civil strife and factions were sent into exile (1.12.1–2) until, “with difficulty and after much time, Hellas became peaceful” (1.12.4).

In Thucydides' “Archaeology,” the course of development is also complicated by the unexpected relation of positive cause and negative effect. For example, Thucydides reports that the most obvious material cause of prosperity, fertile land, had detrimental effects since its ownership stimulated civil war or invasion and consequent destruction (1.2.4), while the poor soil of Attica paradoxically allowed stability (1.2.5–6). Furthermore, materialistic motives may be part of the story of progress but not its full explanation. For example, although Thucydides tells us that the first navy was assembled by Minos (presumably to increase his revenues), we are not told why Minos succeeded in his endeavor in the first place while others did not. Additionally, some causes are more fortuitous. For example, Thucydides records that the Athenians built a navy in belated response to the threat from Persia, rather than as part of a deliberate strategy (1.14), and that the neighbors of Sparta became more prosperous when the Spartans, presumably seeking to advance their own interests, put down tyrannies in other states (1.17–18). Both in the course of change and the motivations for it, Thucydides presents us with a complex, thickly detailed account that cannot be reduced to a single cause or a predictable tendency. Yet if Thucydides' account resists the imposition of a linear scheme, it also resists the imposition of a cyclical one. Thus Hunter would read into the “Archaeology” an essentially unchanging, archaic notion of power bringing about its own demise,¹⁵ but Thucydides does not describe the failures of Minos, Corinth, or the other naval powers, nor does he attribute comparable limitations to any of these. The strength of his account is instead in its detailed attention to the complexities of cultural development and its

lack of attempt to extract a single explanation.

Thucydides' "Archaeology" thus presents a richer view on cultural development than that of the speech of Sisyphus (which may have offered no more than a cynical account of the origins of religion). At the same time, it offers a more complicated perspective than that of *Antigone* (which after all is a dramatic song on human nature). To find attempts to explain such a complex process of cultural development, we must turn to two of the historian's contemporaries in the late fifth century.

CULTURAL HERMENEUTICS

The atomism of the philosopher Democritus presented a new understanding of the natural world. This understanding was roughly comparable to the materialistic view of the past in Thucydides' "Archaeology."¹⁶ The philosopher's account of the origins and development of human culture served as a model for the famous verse narrative in the *De rerum natura* of Lucretius (5.925–1457). While Democritus's own words on the subject (unfortunately) do not survive, we can draw on Diodorus, whose universal history includes an account of the origins of human crafts through necessity and experience (1.8). This account is based on the theories of the atomists and probably derives to a large extent from Democritus.¹⁷

The most detailed portion of this narrative (and the most useful for our purposes) describes the origin of language. Of humans' early attempts at spoken communication, Diodorus reports:

The sounds they made had no sense and were confused; but gradually they articulated their expressions and, by establishing symbols among themselves for every sort of object, they made the interpretation in each case intelligible to one another. Such groups came into existence throughout the inhabited world, and all did not have the same spoken language, since each group organized its expressions as chance had it. Hence there are languages of every type, and the groups who first came into existence were the founders of all the different races. (1.8)

In this view, the desire to communicate is universal, and the resulting development of signs from inarticulate noises is inevitable, yet because this same phenomenon occurred many times over and because different groups associated different sounds with given objects, each group developed a different language. Diodorus's summary thus accounts for what we would today call the arbitrary nature of the sign, whereby one group of humans happens to hit on the word *hand* while another comes up with the word χεῖρ for the

same body part. This agrees with Democritus's own views on the random assignment of names in accordance with $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma\iota\varsigma$, not $\Phi\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma\iota\varsigma$ (B26 D-K).

Although the course of change according to Diodorus is thus not only materialistic but also relatively complex—insofar as it yields plural results, such as the multiplicity of spoken languages—it is simple in other respects. Diodorus assumes that all groups of humans will somehow discover language, and he goes on to suggest that all will follow the same course of development: first they learn to speak, then to build shelters, then to use fire (1.8). This has a striking parallel in Democritus's account of the development of *kosmoi*, as paraphrased by Hippolytus.

There are innumerable worlds, which differ in size. In some there is no sun and moon, in others they are larger than in our world, and in others more numerous. The intervals between the worlds are unequal; in some parts there are more worlds, in others fewer; some are increasing [$\alpha\upsilon\acute{\xi}\epsilon\varsigma\theta\alpha\iota$], some at their height [$\acute{\alpha}\kappa\mu\acute{\upsilon}\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$], some passing away [$\Phi\theta\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$]; in some parts they are coming to be [$\gamma\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\varsigma\theta\alpha\iota$], in others failing [$\epsilon\kappa\lambda\epsilon\acute{\iota}\pi\epsilon\iota\nu$]. They are destroyed by collision one with another. (Democritus 68 A40 D-K)

The mechanisms of world formation that Democritus describes elsewhere (including separation, revolution, attraction of like to like) are universal, and the resulting generation of worlds, or *kosmoi*, is inevitable, as is the development of language. Yet because this process happens innumerable times under varying circumstances, each resulting world is different and develops at a different pace. What makes Democritus's system complex is not a variation in the mechanism of change but the variety of what we would call initial conditions: each world develops according to identical principles acting on a different number and arrangement of atoms, just as each stretch of beach is produced by the same physical process of separation acting on its unique mixture of sand and pebbles (B164).¹⁸ In general, the variety of observed phenomena, including chance differences among languages, customs, and so on, is a manifestation of the same necessary patterns acting in these same ways on different sets of atoms, pebbles, or humans—hence Democritus can claim, as reported by Aristotle, that nature operates by necessity (A66).

With its single, underlying principle of necessity, Democritus's account of the development of human society is closer than we might suspect to that of Sophocles, which relies on a single principle of innate human ability; nevertheless, there are two important differences. First, in Sophocles, there is no variation through time in cultural development, as invention follows on invention in continual

succession, whereas in Democritus, human society develops through distinct steps or stages. According to Democritus, initially people learned to form communities and speak to one another; then they discovered primitive shelters and the storing of food, fire and other necessities, and finally the various advantages of social life (1.8). The trajectory in which one stage of development follows another is like that of worlds that proceed through various stages, growing, flourishing, and passing away like living things; the timeless continuum of Sophocles is replaced by an unfolding organic sequence with a beginning, middle, and end. Second, Democritus saves the complexity of phenomena by introducing not a single trajectory of change but multiple parallel ones. From this it follows that variety and complexity are dependent not on time, given that each system follows a necessary, organic development, but on space and the proliferation of similar systems in different parts of his world.

Since change through time is governed by necessity, Democritean doctrine is to some degree teleological.¹⁹ According to this doctrine, a given group of primitive human beings, although unique, will advance predictably through a specific sequence of stages and will develop a language that will likely be different from other languages, employing different words; more generally, given matter suitable to form a *kosmos*, we can predict that it will organize itself in certain ways and will eventually decay, even if we cannot predict the size and number of its suns and moons. This view that events are inherently directed is not shared by Thucydides' "Archaeology" or by the Hippocratic *Ancient Medicine* (considered next in this chapter), which also features a more explicit theory of cultural development.²⁰

From Raw to Cooked

At some point near the end of the fifth century, a Hippocratic writer described the early development of the human diet, insisting on a close analogy with the early development of medicine. In the treatise *Ancient Medicine*, this writer argues that just as the doctor's craft was founded not on abstract principles but on the practitioner's experience of what helps or harms a patient, so expertise in the human diet came from learning by trial and error which foods were edible and which were not. The embedded narrative on the origins of cooking and dietetics is thus an extended illustration of how human skills, or *technai*, arise and develop; as such, this narrative directly supports the larger claims of the treatise. The medical writer describes the acquisition of cultural skills as not sequential (as in Sophocles) but

cumulative (as in Democritus), since humans had to learn first which foods were edible and which were not and then the techniques of baking and boiling, in addition to the best ways to combine foods.

The text is most explicit about the mechanism of change, which results from the necessity attending given circumstances.

In the beginning the craft of medicine [ἡ τέχνη ἡ ἰατρικὴ] would not have been found or searched for (since there was no need for it) if sick people in their way of life and diet benefited from the same things that the healthy eat and drink and otherwise make use of and if there was nothing better than these. But necessity itself caused men to search for and find medicine, since the sick did not benefit from the same things as the healthy, just as they do not today. Going further back, I do not think that the way of life and food that the healthy now use would have been found if it were enough for a human to eat and drink the same things as a cow and a horse and all other animals—namely, things that grow from the earth (fruits and wood and grass). On these, animals are nursed and grow and live without trouble and need no other food. And I think that in the beginning humans also used this kind of food. (3.1–3)²¹

In Democritus, circumstances affect, say, the number of moons in a *kosmos* or the sign for “hand” in a language; in *Ancient Medicine*, circumstances determine whether change will occur at all. Since human constitutions differ from those of horses, our inability to digest wood and grass led by necessity to the development of cooking, just as the inability of those who are sick to tolerate the same foods as the healthy led to the art of medicine. The author explicitly states that these arts would never have developed if such differences had not existed; as he reiterates at a later point in the treatise, if the same foods were suited to both healthy and sick people, no one would have ever discovered medicine (5.1). Furthermore, the inevitability found in Democritus at the macroscopic level of rising and falling systems is absent in the medical text, not only from the origins of human skills, but also from their subsequent development.

Present ways of life were found and fashioned, it seems to me, over much time. For they suffered greatly and terribly from a violent and bestial way of life when they took food that was raw and unmixed and of strong qualities—just as today they would also suffer from these things, falling with violent pain and disease and swift death. At one time they probably suffered less, being used to it, but severely even then, and most of them, having weaker natures, probably died, while the stronger ones held out for a longer time, just as today some deal easily with harsh foods, while others do so with great pain and trouble. (3.3–4)

Necessity is a harsh mistress, but at the same time, since those with stronger natures or who choose more suitable food live longer, nature also promotes the creation of both new foods and a new craft.

It seems to me that because of this need, people then also looked for food that

agreed with their nature and found that which we use today. From wheat, after soaking it and winnowing and grinding and sifting and kneading and baking, they produced bread, and from barley, barley cakes. Working away at their food in many other ways, they boiled and baked and mixed, and combined the strong and unmixed with the weaker, adapting everything to human nature and power in the belief that, when things are too strong, human nature will not be able to cope with them if they are taken and they will produce pain and disease and death, but those that it can cope with will produce nourishment and growth and health. (3.4–5)

Humans do not start with a special or astounding talent; rather, they start with pressing needs and, in a given situation, try to find the most useful, or least harmful, alternative—such as finding techniques to make raw food more palatable. According to Sophocles, a special talent propels humans toward remarkable discoveries; in *Ancient Medicine*, circumstances, including particular needs and dangers, stimulate the development of new skills.

Since the process of discovery as it is described in *Ancient Medicine* depends on individual circumstances, we cannot predict when and where it will occur or even whether it will occur at all. As the author of *Ancient Medicine* points out, foreign peoples and even some Greeks failed to develop medicine at all (5), and in the early stages of medical practice, mistakes would have been made—for example, giving the same liquid diet in all cases—that did more harm than good (5–6). He reminds us that even in his day errors were unavoidable and that experiments with diet could hurt or even kill a person (13.1–2). Mistakes and disasters are inevitable because, as the treatise clearly asserts, there can be no a priori certainty whether a given food is good or bad; rather, that must be determined (6–7), since a healthy person's food is often harmful to a sick person, just as an animal's food is usually harmful to a human (8). The writer further offers his opinion that the craft of medicine will keep making more—and more accurate—discoveries (8.3, 12.2) as long as its careful practice continues: “according to this method, many excellent discoveries have been made in the course of time,” he observes, “and the rest will be discovered if one is competent and aware of prior discoveries and starts one's own inquiry from these” (2.1). The writer maintains that given the proper circumstances, incremental improvements will continue to build on those that came before, though this is not guaranteed.²² Whereas Sophocles and Democritus both isolate a single mechanism or set of mechanisms in human talent or the properties of matter, *Ancient Medicine* describes change as a complex process that is based on the collective needs of humans and may or may not produce a discovery, depending on the circumstances of the moment and the resourcefulness of those involved.

In this way, the author of *Ancient Medicine* provides an explicit model for the kind of change Thucydides describes. Both accounts observe a steady course of improvement in the human condition and do so in banal spheres (military resources and diet); additionally, both observe that improvement is not inevitable and that mistakes and regressions occur. Yet it is the medical writer, rather than the historian, who offers an explanation. Thucydides observes and describes undirected change, but the Hippocratic writer articulates the reason for it, identifying three important factors. First, in any given situation, necessity forces a choice, rendering choice meaningful. We might call this the paradox of freedom, for, as the author points out, if choice is meaningless—that is, if the same food were suited to both healthy and sick people—the craft of medicine would not have been discovered at all (5.1). Only where meaningful choice exists does necessity compel us to choose between different foods—for better or for worse. Second, practical experience generally allows one to find the optimal response in any given situation. Since each situation is different, the choice that was best in one set of circumstances (e.g., diminishing the quantity of food) may not be best in another (5.3–4), and only by learning from past results can one hope to improve the chances for success.²³ Of course, experience is not an infallible guide, and sometimes one is compelled to guess at the better alternative; whereas Thucydides observed of the Battle at Sybota that “this necessary result came about by chance,” *Ancient Medicine* claims that a chance result is driven by necessity. Third, in *Ancient Medicine*, the larger story of human development is made up of incremental developments derived from individual situations and responses: over a long period of time, humans first discovered techniques to cook and process food and tried various ways of combining foods (3), with each new discovery building on those that went before. It follows from these three factors that *Ancient Medicine* fully embeds events in time in a way that other narratives of human development do not. The succession of events forms a continuum in which the present is open inasmuch as it involves meaningful choice but is not independent of past and future, as it necessarily develops from what precedes and will have results in the future that experience will perhaps be able to anticipate but not predict. Thus while Thucydides indirectly challenges earlier triumphal models of human development by describing events that resist such an interpretation, the author of *Ancient Medicine* goes further, providing a coherent and explicit account of uncertain and incremental change.

A Sophistic Empiricism

My reading of *Ancient Medicine* requires some explanation. On the one hand, as I argue, the treatise presents a more sophisticated account of human development than it is usually credited with by critics who regard the author of *Ancient Medicine* as an adherent or follower of the notions of human progress prevalent in his day,²⁴ or, in Hans Herter's phrase, "a child of his times."²⁵ Even Jacques Jouanna, who notes the unusual clarity with which this text describes both the relation between necessity and discovery and the continuation of this process in the future, treats these concerns as fuller descriptive detail rather than indicative of a conceptual difference or revision. He concludes that the Hippocratic author expresses the same view as Sophocles and other contemporaries and not an alternative, more sophisticated view.²⁶ On the other hand, however, the more innovation we grant to *Ancient Medicine's* account of human development, the more this seems to conflict with the conservative program the text as a whole champions. From the opening chapters, the author argues that the practice of medicine is indeed a *techne*, or a coherent skill, but one based on experience rather than postulates or suppositions. In repudiating *hypotheseis*, or suppositions, and defending the traditional practice of medicine, the author seems also to reject a newer and more rational or philosophical form of medicine in favor of the return to an older (and presumably more naive) one. According to Ludwig Edelstein, the author "bitterly opposes" newer forms of medicine, believing that "only by following the example that was set of old can further discoveries be made."²⁷ The sophisticated and revisionist author of the section on human development would thus seem to be at odds with the naive or reactionary author of the overall work, but this contradiction is a false one. I shall here set out in greater detail the theoretical basis for the author's view of change.

The treatise begins with a bold and sophisticated challenge, announcing that all who have previously spoken or written on medicine have erred in two ways:²⁸ their understanding of physiology rests on reductive suppositions, or ὑποθέσεις and their view of medical practice neglects the process of learning and acquiring skill.

All who have tried to speak or write about medicine are clearly wrong [καταφανεῖς εἰσι γὰρ ἁμαρτάνοντες] when they propose to rest their argument on a supposition [ὑποθέσεις]—heat or cold or wet or dry or anything else they want—thus narrowing the fundamental cause of human diseases and death and supposing that in all cases the same one or two are the cause; they especially deserve criticism when this involves an existing craft [τέχνη] that all people use in important circumstances and whose good craftsmen and practitioners they honor highly. (1.1)

For all the rhetorical inflation of this opening salvo, the author goes

on to provide clear epistemological reasons for his position.²⁹ As he explains, it is appropriate to make suppositions only in connection with invisible and insoluble matters.

So I conclude that it has no need of a novel supposition³⁰ as do invisible and insoluble matters, about which you must make suppositions if you try to say anything—about things in heaven, for example, or those beneath the earth. Even if one were to speak of these things and know how they work, it would remain unclear to both speaker and listener whether they are true or not, since there is nothing to compare them with, which clear knowledge requires. (1.3)

The author thus neither resists innovation per se nor argues for the superiority of one approach over another; he instead launches a broad critique of hypothetical reasoning in general. Just as Protagoras used a critique of grammar to challenge the authority of Homer, the Hippocratic author uses a critique of suppositions to challenge the prevailing accounts of medicine.

The sophistic claims of *Ancient Medicine* should thus be clear.³¹ Yet despite similarities with Protagoras, the treatise has deeper affinities with later thinkers and with the Sophists of what de Romilly calls the second wave, who moved from negative critique to positive doctrine³² and shifted from debunking familiar or traditional views to co-opting them. Specifically, these later Sophists developed an equally provocative but more “constructive” paradox that conventional notions were intellectually valid only if based on radically new premises. For example, the *Anonymus Iamblichi* maintains the importance of law and justice while arguing that these must be founded on self-interest (89 B3 D-K). Prodicus, in his myth “The Choice of Heracles,” praises an excellence involving hard work, moderation, and good reputation and condemns wickedness, pleasure, and self-indulgence; his reasons for doing so, however, are unconventional both in form (opposing speeches by personified Wickedness and Excellence) and in content: in describing the advantages of a virtuous life, the personified Excellence appeals not to Heracles’ innate virtue or his ancestry but to his own interests (84 B2). In Plato’s *Republic*, Thrasymachus explicitly praises the “ancestral constitution,” although to judge from his other fragments, he is likely to have based such praise on a novel and shocking calculus of power (85 B1; cf. B6a). *Ancient Medicine* follows this same rhetorical strategy. The old practice of medicine is praised not because it has some kind of inherent or longstanding authority but, rather, because it is based strictly on the senses and involves an empirical method founded on a calculus of self-interest: in each situation, one must ask whether a food will be harmful or beneficial.

Some scholars have already noted that *Ancient Medicine* borrows sophistic ideas and takes a similar interest in *technē*;³³ I suggest that *Ancient Medicine* is an important intellectual work in its own right and stands at the fore-front of the later sophistic period. Against those who would find certainty in suppositions, such as hot and cold, the author of *Ancient Medicine* argues that the medical craft can have no certainty—except in careful observations, skilled inferences from those observations, and a body of practitioners willing and able to accumulate this kind of empirical data. According to this view, the old *technē* is valid after all, but only when founded on a sophisticated empirical method. Given the author's empirical approach, his claims must finally rest not on abstract argument but on concrete evidence, so the remainder of his treatise turns to demonstrating the need to proceed from material evidence rather than abstract suppositions. Taking the example of a sick man with a weak constitution, the author questions whether he will be helped more by adapting his diet to his weakened condition or by following suppositions concerning hot and cold, moist and dry. At this point, the author stops himself: experience, he concedes, is more effective, but it will never be entirely effective. The author of *Ancient Medicine* admits that since one cannot anticipate every contingency and cannot know the effect of every kind of food on every kind of person, the doctor must accept uncertainty in his craft.

Of course I also know that it makes a difference for a person's body whether bread is refined or coarse, made of winnowed or unwinnowed wheat, kneaded with much or little water, heavily kneaded or unkneaded, fully baked or undercooked, and countless other things as well. And the same is also true of barley. (14.1)

Thus the author of *Ancient Medicine* describes the complex factors and the possible effects that the doctor must consider in much the same way as Antiphon sympathizes in *Homonoia* (discussed in [chapter 2](#) of the present study) with the complex situations and difficult choices of ordinary experience.

Chance and Necessity

Ancient Medicine co-opts traditional views of the medical craft to portray human progress as a form of cultural hermeneutics. No Titan intervenes to teach cooking, nor is discovery an immediate result of human talent; rather, in the calculus of daily nutrition, necessity demands choices that may help or harm. Relying in part on chance and abetted by the memory of previous decisions and their consequences, humans will gradually improve and refine their diet.

Progress is not inevitable, however, nor is complete knowledge attainable, since individual choices can be disastrous, and cumulative results will spell improvement only as long as those involved in the collective enterprise learn from such mistakes. There is thus a fundamental difference between the unitary schemes of Aeschylus and Sophocles and the more complex schemes of Thucydides' "Archaeology" and the Hippocratic *Ancient Medicine*, both of which portray individual events and large-scale trends as equally unpredictable. Moreover, while both of these works describe a tendency toward improvement over the long term and a mechanism (i.e., need and a utilitarian striving for survival or advantage) that tends to yield improvements in the short term, there is no mechanism or principle that guarantees improvement at either level.

At this point, it is worth asking whether this uncertainty is itself unavoidable: does either Thucydides or the Hippocratic author believe that unpredictability is a necessary part of the story of human development, or may we downplay the regressions and setbacks they describe by understanding these either as incidental obstacles (to borrow Aristotle's notion) to an otherwise coherent and intelligible end or as part of a larger design (to anticipate the idea of the Stoics) that human intelligence has yet to fathom? For these particular writers, unpredictability is neither a primary player in human history nor something incidental or illusory. Not only does Thucydides' "Archaeology" describe a new period of instability after the Trojan War, but his war narrative also places remarkable emphasis on the unexpected setback of the plague; and *Ancient Medicine* makes it clear that while improvement is not guaranteed, blunders are. The latter work's extended comparison of most doctors with poor pilots (9), while no doubt serving to insinuate the author's own superiority, more importantly indicates that errors often pass unnoticed except in a crisis and that even the best doctor will make mistakes (9.4). Thucydides likewise famously claims for his *History* a larger purpose as a lasting possession for those who desire a clear view of what has happened and what may happen in the future, given human nature (1.22). The historian makes no claim, however, to a comprehensive knowledge of human nature, nor does he suggest that such knowledge, if it were possible, could help us predict the future; at most, a full account of the present war, like a detailed case history, can help future observers understand similar instances of human conflict. *Ancient Medicine*, by contrast, describes a hermeneutic process that is both more detailed and more progressive: from precise observations over time of what treatments work in what circumstances, the conscientious doctor can develop an increasingly

informed intuition of how to proceed in a given situation; the large and often fatal errors of early humans will then give way to the minor errors of a proficient doctor, even though error itself cannot be eliminated, and the refinement of this *techné* depends on the continued diligence of its collective practitioners (12).³⁴

Despite the similarities between the “Archaeology” and *Ancient Medicine*, Thucydides elsewhere emphasizes not incremental development but large-scale or cataclysmic change. He begins by arguing that the war he is about to describe is the largest known; in speaking of civic unrest in Corcyra, he draws attention to the larger, profound and revolutionary changes in attitudes and beliefs; and even his account of the first Spartan invasion of Attica places great emphasis on the more sweeping costs involved.

They were weighed down and bore with difficulty abandoning their houses and the temples that had belonged to their ancestors since the city’s beginnings, preparing to change their way of life and do nothing less than each abandon his own city. (2.16)

Thucydides thus has a special interest in traumatic change, an interest not shared by the Hippocratic author, who describes instead the more ordinary improvements in the human diet. Nevertheless, Thucydides’ account differs from *Ancient Medicine* in degree, not in kind: he is struck by monumental changes and their impact on human lives, though these are no more than the highest peaks, so to speak, in a broader terrain of material and unpredictable change.

There are likewise significant similarities between Democritus and *Ancient Medicine*. They are best summarized by citing Thomas Cole’s study of the atomist tradition, which concludes that, according to Democritus, the development of human culture involves a long process of trial and error that, when multiplied or accumulated, yields a form of progress that is naturalistic and nonteleological, an unusually subtle theory of cultural origins that was unique to the late fifth century and disappeared soon afterward.³⁵ Cole’s summary actually applies better to *Ancient Medicine*³⁶ than to Democritus, who describes process within a given system (a *kosmos*, a society, or a beach) as determined by the properties of its components and following an organic development, though one that varies according to initial conditions. This is not true of the nonteleological Hippocratic treatise inasmuch as it describes observations and approximations that are fallible and undetermined every step of the way.

The absence of teleology in *Ancient Medicine* actually helps set in relief its distinctive sense of time. Turning back for a moment to the earlier embedded narratives, we have seen that the Titanic intervention of Prometheus was a single transformation of the human condition from Before to After without any meaningful change over time. Aeschylus's account, too, lacks teleology (if we use this term to mean that events are directed toward a particular end), since although the Titan's After is a kind of end, it is not an end toward which prior conditions have been directed. One could provide such direction by speculating on the intentions of Prometheus and his motives in intervening in human affairs, but that is a different story, dealing not with the development of culture but with the rivalry between Zeus and Prometheus. By contrast, the talent of humankind in Sophocles produces one discovery after another on a clear course of technical (if not moral) improvement. The ode's temporal continuum is simple—change is invariable, without obstacles or interruptions—as is the teleology it expresses, inasmuch as human talent leads ever onward to the discovery of new skills. Toward the end, the chorus warns against transgressing moral limits, hinting at divine punishment, but that is part of a different story, one of conflict between gods and mortals, outside the present narrative of human invention.

Ancient Medicine, like the narratives of Thucydides and Democritus, describes a denser continuum of events. To this extent, all three accounts are more attuned to culture's embeddedness in time than previous ones, though the medical treatise is more specifically attuned to a "heuristic present." By this I mean that the practitioner must take account of present symptoms and circumstances, draw on accumulated past experience, and anticipate the possible outcomes of various therapies. His *technē* is therefore described not in terms of facts or principles gained through hindsight but as the uncertain process of making the best approximation at a given moment. *Ancient Medicine's* comparison of doctors with helmsmen underscores this perspective, focusing as it does not on the lessons learned about navigation but on the process of guiding a ship as well as possible in a calm or, more crucially, in a storm (9). In this heuristic present, knowledge is necessarily incomplete, and even though the author insists that some pilots are better than others, none can hope to be perfect. These limitations are most forcefully demonstrated in the case of the doctor, for whom there are some situations in which not even all the wisdom that comes with hindsight will avail. *Ancient Medicine* explains that despite the general rule that the sick need weaker and more liquid food, there is always an unforeseeable exception: "it must be clearly understood that gruel does not help some in disease, but

when they take it, their fever and pain are intensified, and it is clear that the provision offers nourishment and growth to the disease and sickness and weakness to the body" (6.1–7).

The heuristic present, as I have described it so far, involves the individual practitioner and the limitations of the craft. Nevertheless, *Ancient Medicine* is above all concerned with the medical *technē* as a shared body of knowledge and practices; in this larger perspective, the limitations of the craft are, if anything, more severe. Medicine will continue to improve, we are told, as doctors learn from their predecessors and use their own skills to refine the body of knowledge they pass on to their successors. Yet, just as any single doctor may prove lazy or incompetent, so, too, if there is not a critical mass of effective doctors, the *technē* itself may cease to improve. The rhetorical urgency of the treatise, which partly reinforces its polemic against those who invoke suppositions (1) or claim that medicine must begin with philosophy (20) and in favor of the "ancient," empirical approach to medicine, is actually a plea on behalf of the entire discipline: unless all practitioners, conscious of their place in a heuristic present, do their best to move the craft forward, the gains built up since earliest times may be lost. To understand human culture and its development, in other words, the author turns not to a past intervention that raised humans above animals, nor to an innate talent that makes us what we are, but to a complex, continuing process in which a collective enterprise may at any moment encounter success or failure.

SUCCESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

The accounts of cultural development from *Prometheus* to *Ancient Medicine* shift the responsibility for change from the divine to the human to contingent circumstances, first singling out the Titan in Aeschylus or spreading responsibility among Athena, Hephaestus, and Zeus in Plato, then turning to general human talent in Sophocles or to a talented and devious individual in the speech of Sisyphus, and finally identifying not specific agents but an interaction between humans and their surroundings, an interaction driven by physical needs and conditioned by physical and mental capacities (vocalization in Democritus, memory in *Ancient Medicine*) and dependent on circumstances in which their interaction may or may not be profitable. Each moment of interaction may thus be understood as a "now," a particular point at which events occur; yet just as time in some sense comprises an infinite number of consecutive "nows," so, in this more sophisticated view, cultural development comprises an infinite

number of significant moments, and the responsibility for change is spread across the whole continuum. The difference is that Democritus claims he can stand back and discern macrocosmic patterns of change, growth, and decline, while the Hippocratic author does not. As a result, the medical treatise has an ethical dimension lacking in the other accounts: at any given moment, the practitioner must decide how to respond not only to help a sick individual but also to help the collective enterprise of medicine itself.

A similar ethical dimension can be glimpsed, I believe, in a text that, as it has come down to us, gives a rudimentary narrative of cultural history. The *Anonymus Iamblichii* is an anonymous fragment that deals with the subject of justice by advancing a version of the social contract. As we have seen, Protagoras (at least as Plato reports) used the myth of Epimetheus to explain that all people have the same capacity for justice, which, being an innate ability, is thus analogous to the Sophoclean capacity for invention. The *Anonymus Iamblichii*, by contrast, speaks of the continual pressures of necessity that led to social groupings, cultural practices, and the observance of law.

If humans were of such a nature that they were not able to live alone, but formed an association with one another under pressure of necessity, and found out our general way of life and the skills related to it, and cannot live with one another in a state of lawlessness (for this would be even worse for them than once more living alone), it follows that because of these necessities Law and Justice are kings among humans, and they must never change since they are rooted firmly in nature. (89 D-K 6.1)

Whereas in the myth of Protagoras, Law and Justice were implanted by Zeus, here they are kings among people because they answer a supreme necessity, and they must not change, because natural needs are unabating. Here, as in *Ancient Medicine*, needs that persist through time cause humans to enter into the mutual considerations that constitute law or *technai*.

In general, therefore, while earlier accounts of cultural development invoke a special authority (divine, Titanic, or innate) to account for the discovery of such goods as language and medicine, the late fifth-century Hippocratic version describes the ongoing business of improvising remedies for human needs. One immediate context for such a shift is the rapid rise of the medical profession and what we might call “information technology”: doctors traveling from city to city across the Greek-speaking world compiled a growing database of symptoms and case histories, bringing back to the Hippocratic schools written records that in turn furnished the doctors there with a richer and fuller understanding to take with them on their travels. The

individual practitioners were thus part of a far-flung endeavor beholden to no single authority and serving the medical craft in varied and sometimes idiosyncratic ways. The dynamics of cultural development as presented in the treatise are thus both origin and charter for the dynamics of the medical profession—origin since it describes the earliest discoveries that eventually led to medicine, charter since the account of culture in general legitimates the medical *technē* in particular.

A larger context for this change is the wider and faster dissemination of ideas and practices. The travels of artists and intellectuals from one polis to another and the rapid spread of new ideas meant that change and invention belonged more to the Greek-speaking world as a whole than to a particular city-state. Any *technē*—not only cooking and medicine, but also rhetoric and sculpture and politics—was no longer primarily produced by and for the people of one city, and although Athens was the preeminent cultural center, many of the intellectuals and practitioners active there were non-Athenians, and much of what they produced was directly or indirectly consumed outside Attica. In Plato's *Protagoras*, when Hippias of Elis speaks of all people as fellow citizens who converge on Athens as “a Prytany Hall of wisdom” (337d), he is indicating the geographical range of an intellectual enterprise that transcends political boundaries and brings together leading thinkers to conduct the business of wisdom, just as Athenian council members met in the Prytany Hall to conduct the everyday business of government. The intensity with which medical writers and other intellectuals began to theorize *technē* in the late fifth century, as did practitioners of the visual and performing arts,³⁷ indicates the high priority being given to defining each discipline and viewing its practitioners, or *technitai*, as colleagues.

Finally, we should note the political and ideological context of this revised account of cultural development. Athenian hegemony expanded dramatically during the fifth century, provoking a concerted effort by Corinth, Sparta, and their allies to check the city's military and economic growth, and it is not unlikely that these momentous developments played a part in the fifth century's fascination with the rise and development of human society. Christian Meier concludes his discussion of *auxesis*, “an ancient equivalent of the concept of progress,” by stating that “it received a considerable impetus from the immense dynamism that emanated from Athens in all spheres” and “evaporated when Athens was defeated in the Peloponnesian War.”³⁸ Slightly different versions of this imperial model seem to be suggested by Sophocles and Democritus. Sophocles lets his chorus in *Antigone*

voice a Periclean optimism in human nature that is potentially unbounded: new technologies will continue to be invented and—from an Athenian perspective—new heights of creativity and power will be reached; at the same time, however, the author, who was an Athenian dramatist and general, reminds his listeners of the peril involved, the danger of blindly pursuing this course into disaster. In fact, it has been argued that Pericles' forceful and perhaps excessive use of imperial force against the Samians contributed to Sophocles' unflattering portrait of Creon as the “strategos” in this play.³⁹ Our reconstruction of Democritus would imply a more detached or neutral version of this model, one that does not extol the astounding achievements of human society but equates the development of worlds and societies with the birth, growth, and death of plants and animals. One may not be able to say exactly how long a culture (or empire) will endure, but one can predict that it, like any other, will rise and fall over the long term. This perspective might have come all the more easily to a citizen of Abdera, a Thracian city through which the mighty Persian armies had once passed on their way toward Athens and which Athenian navies were now using as a port of call as they pressed toward the East.⁴⁰ If both accounts of cultural development were prompted in part by the expansion of Athenian power, the “natural” version offered by Sophocles, in which innate talents lead to ever new accomplishments, would indeed sit more comfortably inside the Athenian juggernaut, and the “materialist” version of Democritus would happily sit outside, observing the same dynamics at play in Athenian and Persian expansion.

In this context, the revisionist account in *Ancient Medicine* is more troubling by far than the pious warning in *Antigone* or the calculated detachment of the atomist. If the course of cultural development can lead to dead ends and failures as well as improvements and if we can have no confidence that advances will necessarily follow at any stage, there can be no guarantee that a city—even one on the rise—will continue to increase or even maintain its power. The collective enterprise of human society is thus surprisingly robust, because it consists of skills and behaviors developed and refined over a long period of time and because all individuals participate in this heuristic process. Yet the social enterprise is also surprisingly fragile, because it depends at each moment on individual and collective efforts. According to this view, there is no distinction between inside and outside. What is true for Athenians during the sometimes heady, sometimes disastrous years of the Peloponnesian War is equally true for Corinthians, Argives, and Thracians who inhabited the same rapidly changing world.

In reflecting on cultural development, *Ancient Medicine* confronts the challenges of present experience on a wider scale than Euripides, who dramatizes the situations of individual people. Its scope is also wider than that of Thucydides, who narrates the choices and deliberations of the demos and its leaders. In articulating the factors that contribute to improvement or failure, *Ancient Medicine* makes unusually explicit the responsibilities we must shoulder in marching from the present to the future.

Epilogue

SUCH A CULTURAL development as the “present shock” of the late fifth century extends into many different spheres, and while I could easily increase the number of case studies presented here, I have chosen in the preceding chapters to focus on literary narratives, with their almost paradoxical attention to the present. On the one hand, such narratives seem to evade temporality—and hence narratability—by describing not so much a series of events as a moment poised between past and future. On the other hand, they find this apparently timeless moment to be fully implicated in what precedes and what follows—hence the site of crucial decisions and alternatives. Lest my reader suspect, however, that the phenomena I have described are peculiar to such literary narratives, I shall now conclude with a semiliterary example that will flesh out the political and ethical implications of turning toward the present. My example is the public funeral oration, or *epitaphios*, that commemorated Athenian men who died in battle—simultaneously a narrow rhetorical genre and a public, highly political ceremony. This final vignette of present shock will lead to some closing reflections on changes in the late fifth century and beyond.

Thucydides observes that it was an ancestral custom, introduced by Athenians long ago, to hold a common, public funeral with an official speech honoring the citizens who had died in battle (2.34–35). This venue is not especially hospitable to thoughts about the present (about the fallen soldiers to be buried or their grieving relatives and fellow citizens), and it therefore encourages the speaker to turn instead to the past glories of the city and the timeless ideals for which it stands. The orator Hyperides goes so far as to deny that those being honored are dead: “for it is not right to use that word of those who lost their lives in this way for a noble cause; rather, they have abandoned life for an eternal condition” (27). Nicole Loraux in *The Invention of Athens* argues more sweepingly that the *epitaphios* as a genre conjures up a mythical timelessness and represents Athens as outside the world of change: “the funeral oration reveals an ever more imaginary installation of the city in a time that is ever more timeless.”¹ Yet paradoxically, the earliest surviving specimen of the genre, the famous speech that Thucydides attributes to Pericles, is exceptional in several ways, including its attitude toward time.²

The speech in Thucydides is chiefly concerned with the present,

whereas other funeral orations dwell on the past. Following a preamble on the institution of the funeral speech (2.35), Pericles proceeds to show suitable deference to the past, taking as his starting point the citizens' ancestors (2.36.1). But after a brief four lines, their example is trumped by a generation closer to the present: "even more worthy of praise are our own parents" (2.36.2). After less than three lines, he has moved on to the present assembly, "we ourselves, here present, who are now still alive and in the prime of life" (2.36.3). He never looks back, devoting the remainder of the speech to present Athenians and present-day Athens. As Jeffrey Rusten observes in his commentary, whereas most such orations dwell on the mythical past and the glories of Marathon, "Pericles brushes all this aside to move quickly to the present."³ In the preceding chapters, I have regularly distinguished between a general shift in the fifth century from past to present and, toward the end of this period, a close or concentrated attention to the challenges of present experience. Likewise here, although Pericles' praise of the present is highly original,⁴ I shall concentrate instead on one particular feature of the speech that is especially relevant to my concerns: the orator's gesture of offering condolences to the survivors.

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Offering words of comfort to the families of the dead is indeed a rhetorical commonplace yet is fraught with peculiar risks. It is easier to speak of the dead, since a soldier must accept the possibility of death and presumably anticipates an exchange of life for glory, than to speak of the living, since the soldier's wife and children gain no such advantage to compensate for their loss. The speaker can hardly afford to ignore the surviving relatives altogether, yet dwelling on their situation would undermine the goal of public commemoration. The ancient rhetorical handbooks observe this difficulty, and pseudo-Dionysius points out (*Ars rhetorica* 264) that because the forms of consolation used in private speeches do not apply to these public occasions, the speaker must instead deflect attention to the soldiers' glory and the honor of public burial. (Perhaps the surviving speeches handle the difficulty all too well—at least to judge by the reaction of scholars who, despite a sustained interest in Athenian funeral orations, have had little to say about the consolation; Loraux, in fact, makes no mention of it at all.) Pericles, however, reverses this rhetorical strategy, showing an unparalleled interest in the difficulties of survivors and the ways in which they might cope. A brief survey of the genre will demonstrate the nature of his gambit.

The earliest example, Gorgias's *Epitaphios Logos* (6 D-K), is unfortunately incomplete, and our surviving fragment includes dazzling praise of the dead but offers no consolation for the surviving relatives, except perhaps that implied by the phrase "deathless longing [πῑθός] for those not living." The earliest complete speech, the *Epitaphios* ascribed to Lysias (*Or.* 2),⁵ is largely devoted to the past glories of Athens, adding to this historical narrative a relatively brief tribute to the dead (67–70), as if they had already joined the company of their heroic ancestors, and a closing address to surviving family members (71–76). This consolation observes that those who died made a fair exchange with their city but not with their parents: their heroism repaid the city for raising them, but they left their parents only grief (70.6–7). How, the orator asks, can relatives share in the public commemoration when those who sacrificed their lives "made their wives widows, left their own children behind as orphans, and rendered destitute their brothers and fathers and mothers?" (71.6–8). He goes on to contrast their children, who are at least too young to know what sort of fathers they have lost, with their parents, who are now too old to forget their misfortunes (72). By way of explanation, he adds:

What misfortune is more painful than to give birth, and raise children, and bury them, and in old age not only be feeble in body but be deprived of all hopes, becoming friendless and helpless? Before they were envied for their children, but now they are pitied, and they yearn more for death than for life. The better those men were, the greater the suffering of the ones left behind. (73)

He then suggests different scenarios. Whether the city is in trouble or does well, the parents' grief will be magnified, but worst of all will be when they have personal difficulties and have no one to stand by their side (74).

Having thus taken the rhetorical risk of describing the plight of surviving parents, the speaker now calls for a practical reward: "I believe we can only repay the kindness of those lying here if we value their parents as they did, show kindness to their children as if we were their fathers, and offer as much assistance to their wives as they did when alive" (75). Here is the gambit's payoff. The speaker anticipates a return of kindness, *charis*, and he begins and ends this section of the speech using ἀποδίδκει to describe reciprocal exchange: those who died in battle have made proper return to their homeland for the upbringing they received (70.6), and the community can only make proper return for this sacrifice by protecting the families of the dead (75.1–2). The reciprocal relations that knit the community together are in danger of unraveling if the families that send young men into

battle feel slighted; to prevent this, the speaker exhorts the demos to make fair exchange and ensure that the soldiers' families are compensated for their loss. In rhetorical terms, this amounts to a protreptic addressed to the community as a whole rather than a consolation addressed in particular to relatives of the dead, which explains why the catalog of sufferings includes only those of the soldiers' parents, setting aside their children and ignoring their wives. However, by what we might call a form of synecdoche, parents replace the family as a whole, because their situation is the most pathetic and therefore the most effective in securing compensation. The speaker's exhortation is therefore a strictly public gesture and an extension of the city's obligations to the dead. He asks in conclusion: "Whom could we more properly honor than those lying here? And which of the living could we more justly value than their relatives, who profited equally from their excellence but alone suffer true misfortune at their death?" (76). We might call this rhetorical strategy an attempt to overcome personal loss with collective solidarity.

Other examples of the *epitaphios* make little mention of these private sufferings. Hyperides concludes his funeral speech for those who fought against Macedon (*Or.* 6) by saying it is hard to offer consolation. After some general remarks on moderation, his advice consists of drawing up a balance sheet: "One should remember not only the death of the fallen but also the excellence they left behind; although their sufferings deserve lamentation, their deeds deserve great praise; although they did not reach old age, they got an ageless reputation" (41.6–42.5). The focus of his consolation is not the living but the dead, and although grieving relatives might expect to learn of some gains to offset their losses, in Hyperides' bookkeeping, all accounts devolve to the fallen soldiers. His rhetorical shell game, by which he substitutes the glory of the dead for the grief of the living, reaches new heights when he pauses to consider whether the fallen soldiers had children. The orphaned child, after all, is a powerful image of human suffering, and Hyperides' task seems daunting. He proclaims: "Those of them who died without children shall have as immortal children the praises of the Greeks; those who left children behind shall have the country's good will as the children's guardian" (42.5–9). Mention of the city as guardian makes passing allusion to the public maintenance of war orphans in Athens, but this is overshadowed by the finesse with which the dead upstage the living: whether the soldiers had children or not, they will be consoled by the praises of the Greeks in one case and by the city's goodwill in the other. The speech, in its fragmentary state, concludes with a more philosophical consolation—yet one directed again to the dead. "If

being dead resembles not being,” he advises, then the fallen soldiers “have been released from disease and grief and the other things that afflict human life.” He thereupon continues: “But if there are sensations in the underworld and (as we suppose) the attention of a god, then those who defended religious worship will surely receive the god’s greatest attention” (43). This brazen strategy allows only one frame of reference: the dead, not the living.

The *epitaphios* ascribed to Demosthenes (*Or.* 60)⁶ follows a more modest version of this strategy, finessing the problem of consolation by balancing private loss with public gain. The final section of the speech approaches this theme by observing that the living relatives of the dead deserve pity for losing such generous men (32.1), then immediately enlarges its scope to the city as a whole with the claim that “our country’s affairs are desolate and full of tears and grief” (32.3–4). By personifying the city’s loss and making it more concrete than that of the relatives—the city is “full of tears and grief,” the relatives merely “pitiable” (ἐλαιοί)—the speaker subordinates private to public grief. As part of a similar sleight of hand, he first draws up a balance sheet for the soldiers, whom he considers happy despite their death in battle, because they are now immune from the hardships of life and because of the great honors they have received not only in the city but in all of Hellas (33.5–7). He then considers their relatives, weighing their misfortunes against a public duty to bear them honorably (35–36) and finally measuring their private loss against the city’s gain. “It is hard for mother and father to be deprived of children and of those who will care for them in old age,” he belatedly admits, “but it is a lofty thing [ξεμνὸν δέ] to behold the public recognition of their excellence” (36.3–6); he adds, “it is painful for children to be orphaned of their father, but it is a noble thing [καλὸν δέ] to have a share in their fathers’ reputation” (37.1–2). This strategy shifts the frame of reference from the living to the dead.

A clever variation of this rhetorical strategy is ascribed to Pericles’ mistress Aspasia in Plato’s *Menexenus*, but the variation is effective only in a fictional context. When Aspasia reaches the point where she must console the living, she claims to have heard advice she must pass on to their families from the dead themselves. “Imagine,” she says, “that you hear my instructions from those [who died] themselves” (246c7). Like a medium, she repeats to the children their fathers’ words: “Sons, the present situation proves that your fathers were brave” (246d1). The dead parents proceed to exhort their sons to rival and surpass their own excellence. There is no mention of the children’s situation or their position as orphans and, in fact, no recognition that they might need consoling at all. A second section of

advice takes a different tack: “as for our fathers and mothers, we must encourage them to bear the misfortune as lightly as possible, if it occurs” (247c5–6). The dead go on to encourage their parents to show the same bravery in endurance as their sons did in battle; they endorse proverbial wisdom about moderation in joy and in grief; and they conclude by further blurring the boundary between dead and living. Their parents, they say, “should know that they will not show us *charis* by lamenting and grieving.” They explain: “If the dead have any awareness of the living, they will show us least *charis* by suffering and by bearing their misfortunes with difficulty. In moderation and ease they will best show *charis*” (248b5–248c2). Repetition of χαρίεις and χαρίζομαι underscores the virtual bond between the speaking dead and their living parents, as the public eulogy is transformed into a private one and as a statesman speaking for the community is replaced by individual citizens speaking to close relations. By this wholesale substitution, the problem of how to address the living is avoided altogether.

The preceding survey of rhetorical ploys adopted in consoling survivors has underscored a long-ignored feature of the *epitaphios*—namely, anxiety about addressing living relatives in a eulogy for the dead. More important, it shall now help us see how Pericles’ funeral speech turns this anxiety on its head. Dwelling not on past glories but on present difficulties, it squarely confronts the needs of living citizens and the community’s obligations toward them.

PERICLEAN CONSOLATIONS

I begin with an important formal difference between the consolation in Thucydides and those of other speeches. After celebrating the greatness of Athens and the values for which the soldiers died, Pericles turns to the living relatives and, in a gesture repeated nowhere else, addresses them directly in the second person: “therefore to the parents of these men—since many of you are present—I offer not lament but encouragement” (τοῦστῶνδε νῦν τοκέας, ὅσοι πάρεστε..., 2.44.1.1). The only other use of the second person to address the surviving relatives is in the fictional speech of Aspasia, where it conveys a personal consolation from the dead soldiers to their own families. In Thucydides, the official representative of the community speaks directly to the grieving parents and continues to use the second person throughout his consolation. Even more startlingly, he does the same thing when he turns to their children: “likewise for those of you who are their children or siblings [παισὶ δ’ αὖ ὅσοι τῶνδε πάρεστε ἢ ἄ

δελφοίς], I see great trouble” (2.45.1.1–2). Finally, however briefly he addresses the soldiers’ widows, the speaker again does so in the second person, saying, “you will have a great reputation” (ὁμῖν μέγα λη ἡ δόξα, 2.45.2.4) if you live up to your natures. For the community’s official representative to speak so directly on a major state occasion to children and women, all noncitizens, is extraordinary; even on a purely formal level, this shows unprecedented concern.

The content of this consolation is equally striking. Of the other *epitaphioi*, only Lysias’s takes the risk of dwelling on the troubles of the living, and this (as we saw) was to parlay sympathy for the parents into an expression of civic solidarity. Even so, Lysias only goes so far as to note how painful it must be for the parents to give birth, raise children, then bury them and lose their support in old age. Thucydides, by contrast, lets his speaker take a staggering risk, describing the losses of parents, children, and wives in turn—not just their immediate grief, but also (as detailed shortly) the various hardships that will follow them throughout their lives. Furthermore, whereas others first concede sorrow or grief and then answer this with collective rewards (saying such things as “Yes, we know you have lost your sons, but at least they died nobly for their city”), Pericles turns this around, as if public success is outweighed by private misfortune: “it is lucky to gain a splendid death as these have,” he says, “although you have gained sorrow” (2.44.1.3–5). As if that were not enough, he empathizes with his listeners, imagining how easily and frequently they will be reminded of their loss: “you have frequent reminders of them in the good fortunes of others, which you once enjoyed yourselves” (2.44.2.1–3).

These rhetorical gambles are accompanied by surprisingly practical advice. If the soldier’s parents are young enough, the orator suggests, they should have more children, since “children who follow will let you forget those who are gone and will bring the city the advantages of population and security” (2.44.3.2–4). If the parents are too old, he advises them to “view as gain the greater part of life, which has been fortunate, consider the future brief, and be lifted up by the fame of these men” (2.44.4.1–4). Rather than deflect attention away from the personal troubles of the parents, as other speakers do, Pericles shows that he understands their situations, and he tries to help them cope. His suggestions also have some bearing on public affairs, since those who have more children will aid the city’s recovery. But especially surprising is the attention devoted to private concerns by the preeminent figure in Athens on this important public occasion.

The same is true of his interest in other relatives. It goes without saying that children and siblings will be hurt by their loss, but the orator is not afraid to look more closely. “I see great trouble,” he says, “since people always praise the departed, and given their overwhelming excellence you will hardly be judged slight inferiors, let alone their equals” (2.45.1.2–4). In this case, there is nothing he can offer in the way of practical advice, but this does not make him avert his gaze (or that of the audience) from the troubles of the living. Finally, to judge from the other public eulogies, the speaker could easily have said nothing at all about the soldiers’ wives. In a private funeral, as the ancient rhetorician Menander Rhetor points out (*Rhet.* 421), it is right to address the widow, but one must do so diplomatically in order to avoid alienating listeners by addressing a woman in front of men; in a public funeral, however, there was no obligation to address the widows or make any mention of their plight. Yet Thucydides’ orator, however briefly, addresses those who would least expect it: “those of you who shall now be in widowhood... will have a great reputation if you live up to your nature and are least celebrated by men for excellence or fault” (2.45.2.2–5). Perhaps, as Lisa Kallett argues in discussing these lines, this advice implies a practical exchange whereby the widows, in ensuring that they are not the subject of gossip, may share in the public esteem of their departed husbands.⁷ But in all events, the rhetorical gesture is sympathetic and direct.

To summarize, by comparison with other examples, the consolation in Thucydides’ funeral speech is not only longer but also more specific and riskier. It is more particular in the sense that the speaker first addresses the parents of those who died in battle, then the children and siblings, and then the wives. It is also more particular in the sense that he offers each group a different kind of encouragement; he does not expect all alike to take comfort in the soldiers’ glory. Furthermore, the speaker in this oration takes a greater risk in the sense that he dwells at greater length and detail on the troubles of the living. He also takes a greater risk in the sense that he speaks in the second person—not just to citizens (the parents) but also to women and children.

Pericles’ speech is consequently directed toward the present, not the past, in a manner both compassionate and therapeutic. The speech is compassionate in that it tries to understand fully the troubles of various survivors, imagining the hardships peculiar to parents or siblings. It is therapeutic in that it tries to suggest practical steps to help individuals deal with their particular troubles.

The unusual features of Pericles' consolation have several implications. First, a close reading and careful comparison corrects the negative views of scholars who have judged it "bleak" (Gomme), "cold" (Loraux), "austere" (Rusten), and even "grotesque and callous" (Eide).⁸ Can we perhaps rescue their criticisms by suggesting that the speaker's risky gambit backfired, drawing too much attention to the hardships of surviving relatives? I think not, because aside from deeming the speech a failure, this ignores its pointed paradoxes. When Thucydides' orator first turns to address the families, he says to the soldiers' parents, "I do not lament at your misfortune but rather shall give you encouragement" (οὐκ ὀλοφύρομαι μᾶλλον ἢ παραμυθίζομαι, 2.44.1),⁹ thus explicitly warning that the consolation to follow will be contrary to expectations. Those in misfortune are accustomed to expressions of sorrow, but in offering practical encouragement instead, the speaker implies that the latter will be more welcome. After the initial shock of being denied conventional words of sorrow, listeners will recognize that a blunt assessment of future troubles is in fact more compassionate and more attentive to their needs.

Second, this new kind of consolation helps to revise the ideology of the *epitaphios*. As Loraux argues in *The Invention of Athens*, the funeral speech as a genre converts present into past and temporal or everyday into timeless by immortalizing the dead and inscribing their city "in a time that is ever more timeless" (131). Pericles' consolation, however, does exactly the opposite, drawing attention toward everyday concerns, not away from them. The same is true of other aspects of his speech. For example, in his article on "The Soldier's Choice," Jeffrey Rusten observes that when Thucydides (or Thucydides' Pericles) celebrates the willingness of soldiers to risk death in battle, he describes this not as an allegiance to timeless and impersonal ideals but as a present and immediate decision to place victory in battle over personal fears and dangers.¹⁰ The words of Thucydides that Rusten comments on are worth repeating:

Taking punishment of the enemy as more desirable than [the enjoyment of wealth], and thinking this [punishment] the most glorious of risks, they were willing to accept this risk and ignore all else, entrusting to hope the uncertainty of success, and as for events before them, resting confidence in themselves. (2.42.4)

Here the Athenian dead are commemorated not for their deeds per se or the glory that attaches to these deeds but for an attitude and a choice at the moment of danger.

We can extend these observations on Thucydides and the present, as well as Rusten's observations on the soldier's choice, by considering what I like to call the "ethical present." When the eulogist in Thucydides celebrates the greatness of Athens, he is not (despite Gomme's reading)¹¹ creating an icon of splendor, nor is he (despite Loraux's reading, already cited) placing the city outside of time. Rather, he is celebrating the ethical attitude of Athenian citizens—their ability in concrete situations to respond and adapt, always with a clear view of their own interests and those of the city. For the soldier, this means accepting the dangers of battle in the hope of seizing opportunities for success. For surviving relatives, it means finding the courage and dignity to adapt to their particular circumstances.

Third, Pericles' consolation has implications for scholars' frequent lament that the early examples of the *epitaphios* are lost and thus we cannot really know how original Thucydides was. While we may have no parallel to Pericles' funeral speech, we do have a number of parallels to his interest in the ethical present. For example, Antiphon's book *On Concord*, or *Homonoia*, contained a large number of anecdotes addressing the ordinary difficulties of human experience, and if we can believe the testimonia (which probably have at least a kernel of truth), the Sophist's concern was more than academic. Antiphon reportedly composed an *Art of Avoiding Distress*, advertising that he could use words to treat those in trouble—even claiming that no one could tell him of a pain so terrible that he could not remove it from the mind. A sympathy for present difficulties and an attempt to offer practical therapy is a hallmark both of Pericles' funeral speech and of Antiphon's "Painless Lectures."¹²

The orientation of medical practitioners in this period could be seen as similar. Although the author of *Ancient Medicine* confronts more explicitly than the Sophist the process of professional decision making, he likewise concentrates on the concrete challenges posed by given circumstances, with practical advice on how best to proceed. In other words, the medical writers were concerned both with finding the best therapy for their patients and with the ethical responsibilities that this relationship placed on the doctor.

Finally, we might do well to reflect for a moment on Prodicus, whose myth "The Choice of Heracles" involves a revision as tendentious as any in Thucydides. Mythologically, Heracles, the greatest of mortals, owed his superlative excellence, or *arete*, to his birth from Zeus, greatest of the gods, just as, more generally, the excellence of any human derives from an innate ability granted by the gods; thus Pindar, in *Nemean* 1, uses the example of Heracles to

illustrate the great peaks of excellence (33) also found in the athlete Chromios, whose success rests on god-given ability (8–9). Prodicus, by contrast, attributes Heracles' excellence not to his descent from Zeus or to any inborn quality but to a choice confronting him in the form of two women. The first, whom some call Happiness and others Disgrace, promises him a life of pleasure that will gratify all the senses without demanding work or hardship (84 B2.24–25 D-K = Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.24–25), while the second, called Excellence, tells him that anything truly good requires work and diligence: if you want the gods' respect, you must work to cultivate their goodwill; if you want civic honors, you must labor on the city's behalf; and so on (B2.28). Human excellence, in other words, is not inborn or god-given but the result of choosing certain goods—those that are honored by gods and fellow citizens; that promote prosperity in peacetime and security in war; and that include simple, unforced pleasures (B2.32–33). For Prodicus, as for Plato later, the individual is responsible for choosing his or her own path, though for Prodicus this requires not a knowledge of abstract ideals but, rather, a practical and ethical engagement with a community and its values. As Thucydides turns eulogistic rhetoric on its head, so Prodicus significantly alters conceptions of human excellence, turning attention from the divine and timeless to the temporal, from innate and unchanging values to messy and difficult choices, from ideological certainty to the ethical challenges of particular situations. Prodicus is thus one more specimen brought to light in this cultural cross-section of late fifth-century Greece.

AFTERSHOCKS

I should like to conclude this study by turning away from the particulars of late fifth-century Greece to consider the larger picture, the whole of which the cultural cross-section in this book is merely a part. Yet this is more easily said than done, since the more helpful and coherent our view of the whole, the less accurate it will be. By comparison, Jacqueline de Romilly's book *Time in Greek Tragedy* includes very perceptive observations on each of the three tragedians and organizes these into a compelling narrative. First, it contrasts the divine time of Aeschylus with the tragic, human time of Sophocles and the emotional, psychological time of Euripides. Second, it frames these as a progressive development from archaic to modern. The big picture, in this case, takes in an entire genre and very literally involves a whole with a beginning (more primitive views of divine justice), a middle (the developed tension between human and external nature), and an end (the decline toward modern realism). My own study

cannot aspire to such a synoptic view. Its content, a relatively brief period of upheaval and transition, has a before and after (antecedents in the fifth century, successors in the fourth), but not a beginning, middle, and end. Its method, embracing a wide range of disciplines, requires attention to the peculiarities of each one. A larger view—or, rather, several larger views—has partially emerged as individual chapters compared this period with what went before, but comprehensive overviews are outside the scope or intent of this book. There is no satisfying ending that will gather up the threads of this account. I shall therefore conclude by very briefly sketching the period's various repercussions or aftershocks.

Innovation abandoned. Some striking innovations of the late fifth century were promptly discarded. Before the end of the century, the Athenian council, after adopting, around 431, a solar calendar presumably inspired by Meton, returned to the traditional scheme based on lunar months, and there is no evidence that the experiment was repeated. Thucydides' narrative device of reporting events by campaigning season, thus mimicking the strictly forward flow of "soldier's time," is copied in the opening books of Xenophon's *Hellenica*, which picks up where the earlier historian left off, but is abandoned in the rest of that work and emulated by no other Greek historian.

Innovation abandoned, with aftershock elsewhere. Another of Thucydides' innovations seems to have had a mixed fate. His "internal epoch" for the Peloponnesian War, by which the years are counted numerically starting from the outbreak of hostilities, was emulated by no other historian or chronographer. Yet it is hard to believe that the historian's numerical scheme did not serve as a model, a century later, for the greatest innovation in Greek chronography, the conversion of lists of Olympic victors into a numerical system that counts forward from the first games, which are thus understood as the starting point of Greek history. Perhaps something similar can be said of the council's calendar. In the second century, Athenian inscriptions begin recording dates *kata theon*, "according to the god [i.e., moon]," and it is tempting to suggest that this new scheme (apparently based on calculated conjunction, rather than observed lunar crescent, and presumably helping to coordinate trade among the Hellenistic cities) had as its model the improved calendar used for the council's finances in the late fifth century.¹³

Continuity defused. It is a truism that Euripides paved the way for New Comedy, and some of the features I have here noted in his dramas, especially incident and accident, can be found also in

Menander and the plots of Roman comedy. To take one example, the ability of characters to act in ways an audience does not anticipate, their undecidedness, can be illustrated not only by Iphigenia's change of mind at Aulis but also by Knemon's well-known "apologia" in the *Dyskolos* of Menander, where the protagonist relents from his hostility, asking his stepson to find his daughter a husband and even offering half his estate as dowry. The misanthrope's newfound generosity adds depth, humanity, and realism to his character, and such psychological realism, as Carroll Moulton observes, has its closest analogue in Euripides.¹⁴ Yet there is an important difference. The undecidedness of Euripides' *Medea* or Iphigenia impresses on us a human capacity to improvise (Creon, after all, also changes his mind in *Medea*, as Agamemnon does in *Iphigenia*), whereas Menander's Knemon shows us that a single blocking character with alienating qualities can nevertheless exhibit a socially acceptable gratitude. The difference reflects in part the generic distinctions between tragedy and comedy and in part the authors' emphasis: Euripides expands our awareness by placing his characters under a temporal microscope, revealing their ability to change course at any given moment, while Menander provides the comforting reassurance that even the most thorny character is, after all, good at heart. The formal device that was experimental in the late fifth century thus endorses bourgeois values in the fourth.

Institutionalization. The emphasis of the Hippocratic *Ancient Medicine*—which viewed the development of human culture as undirected, with progress dependent on the collective efforts of all people involved—does not recur in subsequent authors. In some ways, this emphasis is a "flash in the pan," an original approach that was quickly abandoned. What Thomas Cole has to say about the atomists who succeeded Democritus is all the more true of medical writers who followed *Ancient Medicine*.

It is an indication rather of eclecticism and uncertainty, of a system which seeks to accommodate the bold and brilliant hypotheses of Democritus to the more unified and orderly framework of Academic and Peripatetic aetiology and fails to produce a satisfactory compromise. That this inadequate copy remained for nearly two thousand years the most satisfactory account of the origin of culture known to the West, an account which has admirers even today, is a striking testimony to the quality of the original.¹⁵

Yet in some ways the Hippocratic sequel can be described more positively, with the insights of *Ancient Medicine* not so much "neglected and forgotten in later antiquity"¹⁶ as prompting the development of new institutions. In [chapter 5](#), I argued that the medical writer's emphasis on the challenge of preserving and building

on previous observations sought to domesticate cultural development, as it were, by fostering a class of *technitai* aware of their obligations to the profession as a whole. Although enabled by the more recent spread of literacy and the rise of medical centers at Cos and Cnidus, the work of these *technitai* is also continuous with the earlier, more spontaneous accretion of knowledge and skills in prehistory. These domesticated skills were subsequently institutionalized even further in the fourth century, as rhetorical, philosophical, and scientific schools enshrined fully articulated *technai* that would virtually guarantee the preservation of past achievements and continued advances in the future. Archimedes, for example, explains that by writing out in his *Method* techniques for determining areas and volumes, he can help to ensure that others will make further contributions.

It so happens that the theorem I am now presenting was discovered in the same kind of way as those presented earlier; and I decided to write out and publish my method both because I had spoken of it before and did not want to seem an empty boaster and also because I am convinced there will be no small advantage to science. For I suspect that some present or future people, using the method I have demonstrated, shall find yet other theorems that have not occurred to me. (*Ad Eratosthenem methodus* 84.10–18 Mugler)

This awareness that advances are not guaranteed but depend on the aptitude of future practitioners is similar to that of *Ancient Medicine*, even as the chance of error or failure is reduced by publishing this *tropos*, or “method.”

I could continue to present examples. But I think that I have adequately demonstrated that the story of the sequel to this period is not a neat and tidy one. Still, it is intriguing to note that there is at least one Ariadne thread that leads us by its own convoluted path from an early medical writer, to research centers in Athens and Alexandria, and eventually to the public research university where I reflect on the present and the past.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Translation from Arrowsmith, *Aristophanes*, 119–20.
2. Toffler (*Future Shock*, 3) describes “future shock” as “the process by which the future invades our lives.”
3. On complications and splinterings in postmodern fiction, see Heise, *Chronoschisms*.
4. Dodds, “Ancient Concept of Progress,” 2–3.
5. The classic and still valuable discussion is van Groningen’s *In the Grip of the Past*.
6. The classic discussion in this regard is von Leyden’s “Spatium Historicum.”
7. See Hölscher’s *Griechische Historienbilder* and more recent comment in “Images and Political Identity”; on the Stoa Poikile, see also De Angelis, “La Battaglia di Maratona.”
8. Vernant, “Tragic Subject,” 243.
9. Loraux, *Invention of Athens*, 131.
10. The race thus seems—for a moment—to have all the uncertainty and immediacy of “sports time,” for which see Morson, “For the Time Being.”
11. All translations of Greek authors, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.
12. Hölscher, “Images and Political Identity,” 183.
13. Csapo and Miller, “Democracy, Empire, and Art,” 94.
14. The argument of Mohanty in *Literary Theory* is taken up by a range of scholars in Moya and Hames-García, *Reclaiming Identity*. See Dunn, “Narrative, Responsibility, Realism,” for my discussion of some of their contributions, including Wilkerson’s reflections on a gay man’s experience in “Is There Something?”
15. An example of the latter is Boedeker, who argues, in “Presenting the Past in Fifth-Century Athens,” that an interest in temporal change was possible only within the (new) genre of historiography; my following chapters in the present study demonstrate that this is not the case.

CHAPTER 1

1. On the industrial management of time, see O’Malley, *Keeping Watch*. For essays on the construction of time, see Bender and Wellbery, *Chronotypes*.
2. On using daily routine to indicate the time of day, compare Hippocrates *Epidemics* 7.25, 31. On the time of day in Homer, compare Nilsson, *Primitive Time-Reckoning*, 34–36.
3. For a full discussion of this use of a person’s shadow, see Bilfinger, *Zeitmesser der antiken Völker*, 10–20; see also R. L. Hunter, *Eubulus*, 218–19. The length of the shadow (twenty and twelve feet in Eubulus and Menander respectively) would vary according to the season of the year as well as the time of day.
4. In their speeches in court, the orators refer to “the water,” not “the klepsydra” (e.g., Lysias 23.4; Andocides 1.26; Isocrates 18.51; Demosthenes 18.139; Aeschines 3.197).

5. On the water timer found in excavation, see Young, "Athenian Clepsydra." On the quantities of water allotted in various sorts of cases, see Rhodes, *Commentary on the Aristotelian "Athenaion Politeia,"* 719–28.

6. On complex water clocks from the third century and later, see Vitruvius 9.8; Schmidt, *Entstehung der antiken Wasseruhr*, 44–61.

7. The existence and the nature of Babylonian water clocks must be inferred from tables of astronomical data; the units of weight are presumably measures of water, somehow standardized to measure the movement of the stars consistently. For a recent reconstruction, see Fermor and Steele, "Design of Babylonian Waterclocks."

8. In Athens, all units of exchange (measures and weights) were regulated by public officials called *metronomoi* (Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 51.2).

9. See, for example, Rhodes, "Athenian Revolution," 74, 76 (suggesting that Ephialtes did not initiate these reforms but completed or standardized them).

10. The one timer discovered so far apparently has the tribe name ANTIOX [ΙΑΟΞ] written on it. Young ("Athenian Clepsydra," 281–84) inferred that this particular timer was used in legal procedures outside the Heliastia; this would suggest a slightly more widespread use of timers than Aristotle reports. Boegehold (*Lawcourts at Athens*, 85) suggests, however, that each of the tribes contributed dikastic equipment to the Heliastia.

11. The chief sources for the "measured-through day" are Aristotle (*Athenian Constitution* 67), Xenophon (*Hellenica* 1.7.23), and Aeschines (2.126, 3.197–98). For discussion, see Rhodes, *Commentary on the Aristotelian "Athenaion Politeia,"* 722–28.

12. See Armstrong and Camp, "Notes on a Water Clock." The authors note that the water column was redesigned toward the end of the third century, apparently to allow the measurement of equal time units. Since these units would remain unchanged from season to season, they were not seasonal hours, and the modified timer was therefore not a clock. The container stood outside a rectangular building described as the Heliastia by Armstrong and Camp and as an unidentified court building by Boegehold (*Lawcourts at Athens*, 12, 103).

13. An aside in Herodotus implies that some Greeks in the fifth century knew that the polos and gnomon (otherwise used only to indicate solstices and equinoxes, as discussed later in the present chapter) could also divide the daylight into seasonal hours: "the Greeks learned from the Babylonians about the polos and the gnomon and the twelve parts of the day" (2.109). But the seasonal hours and the sundials to indicate them did not come into general use before the third century, as noted by Gibbs (*Greek and Roman Sundials*, 5, 69, 73). Doctors (Hippocrates *Epidemics* 4.12) and astronomers (Pytheas in Geminus 6.9) were the first to count "hours" of the day, but the sundial required for this purpose was an exotic instrument down through the fourth century. When Diogenes the Cynic was shown a sundial, or ὥροσκοπεῖον, he refused to be impressed, saying it was good "only to prevent being late for dinner" (Diogenes Laertius 6.104).

14. On the design of ancient sundials, see Gibbs, *Greek and Roman Sundials*.

15. Athenaeus mentions the intriguing report that Plato used a large klepsydra as a "night time *horologion*" (4.174c). From this, Diels, in "Über Platons Nachtuhr," developed the elaborate hypothesis that Plato invented an alarm clock to wake students at the Academy. Much more plausible would be a version of the Babylonian outflow water timer used to measure the movements of stars (see note 7 to the present chapter).

16. Such a continuum was provided on a shorter scale by the days of the lunar months. But Hesiod (770–828) uses these only as days of good and bad omen, not for the purpose of measuring time.

17. On the various city calendars, see Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology*, 57–138. On the first appearance of the waxing moon, see Aratus 733–35; Geminus 8.11.

18. Mikalson, *Sacred and Civil Calendar*, 13–20.
19. Mikalson, *Sacred and Civil Calendar*, 113–14, 124–30, 137.
20. On adjustments by the archon, see especially Pritchett, “Calendars of Athens Again”; on the nature and extent of these adjustments, see Dunn, “Tampering with the Calendar.”
21. On the (approximate) alternation of full and hollow months, see Pritchett and Neugebauer, *Calendars of Athens*, 12–14. On the (approximate) alternation of regular and intercalary years, see Herodotus 2.4 (“the Greeks add an intercalary month every other year on account of the seasons”); Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology*, 58–59.
22. City calendars continued to begin the month with the new crescent rather than with conjunction, although some inscriptions from the second century have double dates “according to the archon” and “according to the moon” (*kata theon*). Whereas archon dates were peculiar to a given polis, the phases of the moon provided in Hellenistic times a universal standard invariant from city to city. For discussion, see Dunn, “Tampering with the Calendar,” especially 223–24.
23. Pritchett, *Choiseul Marble*, 39–42.
24. Meton’s nineteen-year cycle is described by Geminus (8.48–60); for discussion, see Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology*, 42–49.
25. On Babylonian cycles and the question of priority, see Neugebauer, *Exact Sciences*, 101–2, 140.
26. See the detailed discussion in van der Waerden, “Greek Astronomical Calendars.” John Morgan tells me that by the second century, the Athenian calendar coincided with the scheme of Meton. These results have yet to be published and need not imply that the archon followed Meton’s scheme, simply that his calendar was astronomically precise.
27. Manitius, *Geminus*, 222, 224.
28. Manitius, *Geminus*, 226. Several of Democritus’s weather signs seem to involve similar intervals: the south wind blows five days after the evening setting of Aquila (Manitius, *Geminus*, 224); unsettled weather begins nine days after the evening setting of Pegasus (226); and rain begins ten days after the setting of Arcturus (232). In Geminus, these intervals are given in relation to the schematic zodiac (with fixed numbers of days in each sign) used in Hellenistic times; van der Waerden (“Astronomical Calendars, I”) assumes that Euctemon used the schematic zodiac, but this is unlikely, as noted by Wenskus (*Astronomische Zeitangaben*, 29–30).
29. Geminus reports his date for the morning rising of Sirius (Manitius, *Geminus*, 212); Wachsmuth conjectured that he dated the appearance of the swallow, as reported in the apparatus to line 12 in Manitius’s *Geminus* (226).
30. Manitius, *Geminus*, 216.
31. On calendars in stone from the end of the second century, see Diels and Rehm, “Parapegmenfragmente aus Milet.” For what may be part of a similar calendar from the fourth century, see Brueckner, “Mitteilungen aus dem Kerameikos V,” 23–24. For attempts at reconstructing Euctemon’s parapegma, see Rehm, “Parapegma des Euktemon”; van der Waerden, “Astronomical Calendars, I.”
32. Euctemon was apparently the first to record precise dates for both solstices and equinoxes (Manitius, *Geminus*, 216, 222, 228). The difficulty of precisely measuring the solar year is noted by Herodotus, who says that the Egyptians first “discovered” the year (2.4), then goes on to describe their 365-day scheme.
33. Scholiast on Aratus 752; compare the remark of Aelian (*Varia Historia* 10.7) that Meton “set up *stelai* and marked down the solstices.”
34. For this new precision, note how Euctemon records the rising of Scorpio’s sting (Manitius, *Geminus*, 222) and the rising of Orion’s shoulder (232).

35. Manitius, *Geminus*, 230, 224; compare 214 (beginning of autumn).

36. The existence of an independent council year was demonstrated by Keil, "Athens Amtsjahre"; the evidence is summarized in Dinsmoor, *Archons of Athens*, 323–25. Dinsmoor thought the council's calendar was a solar year based on Meton's nineteen-year cycle, and Pritchett and Neugebauer (*Calendars of Athens*, 94–105) thought it was a schematic calendar of exactly 366 days, but it was more probably an observed solar year of 365 or 366 days; for discussion, see Dunn, "Council's Solar Calendar."

37. See Dunn, "Council's Solar Calendar."

38. Scholiast to Aristophanes *Birds* 997 (= Philochorus 328 F122 FGrH). For a speculative identification of the heliotrope's position, see Kourouniotes and Thompson, "Pnyx in Athens," 207–11. On the possibility that Meton placed a similar device at a place called Colonus, see Jacoby, *Fragmente*, nn. 2 and 11 to the commentary on Philochorus F122 FGrH.

39. For discussion, see Gibbs, *Greek and Roman Sundials*. On the later introduction of the sundial (ῥοσκοπεῖον or ῥοσκοπίον), see note 13 to the present chapter. When characters in Aristophanes speak of the polos (*Gerytades* fr. 163 and *Daitaleis*, cited in Jacoby; see note 38 to the present chapter), they are referring to the heliotrope, not the sundial. For evidence that before Hellenistic times, the polos and gnomon were used for astronomical purposes and not for timekeeping (i.e., as a heliotrope, not a sundial), compare Franciosi, "Zwölf Teile des Tages."

40. Plutarch *Dion* 29.3.

41. Caven, *Dionysius*, 50–55.

42. Mikalson, *Sacred and Civil Calendar*, 182–204. See also Harris, "When Did the Athenian Assembly Meet?"; Hansen, "Was the Athenian Ekklesia Convened?"

43. For a fuller discussion of this passage in *Clouds*, see Dunn, "Uses of Time."

44. On Nicomachus and his public duties as transcriber, see Lysias 30. On the inscribed schedule of sacrifices, see Oliver, "Greek Inscriptions," 5–32; Dow, "Greek Inscriptions." For a recent discussion, see Rhodes, "Athenian Code of Laws."

45. On this passage, compare Thornton and Thornton, *Time and Style*, 108. Foxhall ("Monumental Ambitions") describes the authority of the past as "monumental time."

46. On Hecataeus in general, see Pearson, *Early Ionian Historians*, 25–108; see also Lendle, *Einführung*, 10–18.

47. Bertelli ("Hecataeus") goes much further, speculating that Hecataeus borrowed the equation of one hundred years with three generations from the Egyptians in creating a "chronological backbone" for his *Genealogies*.

48. See further Mitchel, "Herodotus' Use," 57–58. Mitchel correctly emphasizes that Herodotus's generations cannot be converted to a rigid numerical scheme.

49. Heracles had a privileged place in the genealogies of the Spartan kings (7.204, 8.131) and the rulers of Lydia (1.7), but it does not follow that, as Lendle argues (*Einführung* 48), Herodotus used the generation of Heracles as a "Fixpunkt," or epoch, to standardize the dating of mythical events.

50. See Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, especially 173–85. On the beginnings of Greek chronography, see Taylor, "Framing the Past"; on literacy and the construction of genealogies, see Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record*, especially chap. 3.

51. As the inscriptions mentioned by Jeffery (*Local Scripts*, 60–61) make clear, public dedications were accompanied by the name of a civic official long before lists of officials were published or were used for dating events.

52. Den Boer ("Herodot und die Systeme," 32–33) rightly criticizes Strasburger's claim ("Herodots Zeitrechnung," 687–88) that this year is a key point and epochal

date for Herodotus.

53. It might benefit us to know the date and content of the *Prytaneis of the Lacedaimonians* attributed to Charon of Lampsacus (262 *FGrH*); for discussion of some possibilities, see den Boer, *Laconian Studies*, 33–35.

54. On the Athenian archon list, see Meritt, “Greek Inscriptions,” 59–65; Cadoux, “Athenian Archons”; Bradeen, “Fifth-Century Archon List.”

55. Compare T 18, which reports that Hellanicus corrected the generational scheme of Acusilaus. On the chronographic works of Hellanicus, see Pearson, *Early Ionian Historians*, 209–32; see also the briefer treatment in Lendle, *Einführung*, 69–71.

56. Herodotus’s statement that Dionysus, Heracles, and Pan were born approximately sixteen hundred, nine hundred, and eight hundred years before his own time (2.145) relies more on round estimates than on an annual continuum.

57. When Thucydides dates events “to the end of this war,” it is also possible—though I think less probable—that he means the Archidamian War; see Prakken, *Studies*, 53–55.

58. This fixed reference point had to be defined in an intelligible manner, hence Thucydides dated precisely by priestess, ephor, and archon (2.2, quoted earlier in text). Hornblower (*Greek Historiography*, 25–26) is wrong to see a contradiction between the familiar norms used to define this starting point and the innovative scheme that follows from it; this leads him to the strange conclusion that Thucydides is poking fun at traditional dating methods.

59. Both the text and the translation of this passage are problematic. I have given a fairly literal translation of the received text.

60. Plutarch *Numa* 1 = Hippias F 2 D-K. The list of Hippias was later updated and supplemented by Aristotle, whose works included a *List of Olympic Victors*, a *List of Pythian Victors*, and a *Critique of Pythian Victors* (Diogenes Laertius 5.26).

61. Den Boer (*Laconian Studies*, 42–44) argues that Hippias introduced numbered Olympiads, but his only evidence is his emendation of Philistus to yield a numbered Olympiad (ἐπὶ τῆς <ς> or ἐπὶ <ἕκ> της Ὀλυμπιάδος). Plato has Hippias take pride not in developing a new chronological system but in memorizing long lists of names (*Hippias Major* 285d–e). Jeffery (*Local Scripts*, 59) restores a plaque from the end of the fifth or early fourth century (Dittenberger and Purgold, *Inscriften von Olympia* 17) as part of a victors’ list with the number of the Olympiad, but this requires emending the text (reading]ΚΟΣΤΟΛΤΜΙΙΑ[, which Dittenberger renders]κος τῶλυμπια[, as]κοςτ<ο> Ὀλυμπια[σιν ἀγῶνος ?]), and would seem to require that the preceding line include both the remains of a prayer or imprecation such as]μηδεν ποτεχε[σθαι and a numerical phrase, such as [εκτο και ενεε-] κοστο.

62. Hellanicus’s list of victors at the Carnea (F 85–86 *FGrH*), if not solely concerned with developments in music, may have advanced an equally aristocratic but more provincial Spartan time line.

63. Thucydides may or may not have been influenced by Hippias in his mention of clothing at the Olympic Games (1.6.5) and his naming of two Olympic victors (3.8.1, 5.49.1). In the two naming passages, Thucydides’ narrative of events at Olympia takes note of Dorieus’s second victory and the double victory of Androsthenes; there is no suggestion that he is using their names to date his narrative.

64. The fame of Timaeus’s collation is acknowledged by Diodorus (5.1.3) and Polybius (12.10.4).

65. For a negative assessment of his unique scheme, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus *On Thucydides* 9. Thucydides’ scheme and Dionysius’s critique are discussed more fully in [chapter 4](#) of the present study.

66. Thucydides’ scheme might therefore be called relative rather than absolute. It

does not follow, as Virginia Hunter suggests (*Past and Process*, 166–69), that it simply involves a naive sense of duration. Thucydides’ scheme was unusual in its precision and in replacing civic time with a collective present.

67. Allen (“Schedule of Boundaries”) draws a contrast between the “democratic” use of water to measure time and the “elite” use of the sun. This contrast, however, is based only on the known use of water timers in the law courts and the hypothetical elitism of those who owned and used sundials. Other errors include calling the water timer in the agora a clock (cf. note 12 to the present chapter) and calling Meton’s heliotrope a sundial.

CHAPTER 2

1. For a fuller discussion of these terms, see Degani, ΑΙΩΝ.

2. The image of a child at play moving “board-pieces” needs no elaboration. If Heraclitus meant us to think of a specific game or a specific way of playing the game, he would have said so. As it is, he uses the most general term possible, since (as Austin demonstrates in “Greek Board Games”) περσσοί can refer to any board game, played with or without dice. We therefore have no need of Hussey’s conjecture (“Heraclitus,” 107) that the child plays both sides of the board at once or of Kurke’s conjecture (*Coins, Bodies, Games, and Gold*, 263–64) that the child controls a special piece called the “basileus.”

3. Kahn’s clear and sensible commentary (*Art and Thought*, 227–29) is vitiated by his attempt to resolve these paradoxes; hence he makes the tendentious claims that adornment is produced by random sweepings and that balance emerges from childish play, neither of which is supported by the Greek.

4. For line 19, I give the received text, preferred by most scholars over that of Diels and Kranz.

5. On overlapping uses of the Greek verb εἶναι meaning “to be,” see Kahn, “Greek Verb.” For an ontological interpretation, see Owen, “Eleatic Questions.” For a propositional emphasis, see Kahn, “Being in Parmenides.” For a predicational reading of Parmenides, see Mourelatos, *Route*; Curd, *Legacy*.

6. Mourelatos (*Route*, 110) remarks on Parmenides’ central concern with “the nontemporality of reality.”

7. There is an immense bibliography on Zeno’s paradoxes; for a summary of arguments concerning them and a useful survey of Greek views of time, see Lloyd, “Views on Time.”

8. For a brief sketch of these anticipations, see Dunn, “Rethinking Time.”

9. On Pythagorean numbers, see, for example, Burkert, *Lore and Science*, 30–46.

10. Aristotle *Physics* 4.10, 218b7–8 (parsing B33 D-K). According to an anecdote reported by Plutarch (*Platonic Question* 8 = *Moralia* 1007B), Pythagoras called time “the soul of the heavens.”

11. According to Porphyry, Protagoras taught that “In certain periods of time, what once happened happens again, and nothing at all is new” (14 Pythagoras 8a DK).

12. For a good introduction to Empedocles, see Wright, *Empedocles*.

13. For a detailed discussion of seeds and portions in Anaxagoras, see Schofield, *Essay*. Schofield rejects the evidence for an argument from nutrition (B10 D-K). As Teodorsson (*Anaxagoras’ Theory*, 65–70) emphasizes, infinite divisibility allows Anaxagoras to combine No-Becoming with Plurality (hence changeless being with the appearance of time).

14. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 50, 237.

15. De Romilly, *Great Sophists*, 9.

16. Surveys that begin with Plato and Aristotle include Rau's "Theories of Time" and Sorabji's *Time, Creation, and the Continuum*. Historical surveys that skip over our period without comment include de la Harpe's "Progrès de l'idée du temps" and Lloyd's "Views on Time." Ferrari's *L'Espace et le Temps* includes a series of essays that likewise jumps from the earlier pre-Socratics to Plato and Aristotle. Wright's chapter on time and eternity (*Cosmology in Antiquity*, 126–44), though not arranged historically, discusses the earlier pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, with no mention of authors from the sophistic period. Levi devotes an entire monograph to the concept of time before Plato, but only two pages to the Sophists (*Il Concetto del Tempo*, 92–93).

17. For example, Diels and Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 2:254; Untersteiner, *Sofisti*, 1:19; Dumont, *Les Sophistes*, 25.

18. For Protagoras as grammarian, see most recently Kerferd, *Sophistic Movement*, 68–69. For a critique of this view, see Fehling, "Zwei Untersuchungen," 212–17 (reprinted in Classen, *Sophistik*, 341–47); compare Segal, "Protagoras' *Orthoepeia*."

19. The phrase cannot refer to the verb, as Pfeiffer (*History*, 38–39) shows. The phrase is ignored by Guthrie (*History*), Untersteiner (*Sophists*), and de Romilly (*Great Sophists*). The meaning of the phrase is left mysterious by Pfeiffer (*History*, 38) and Dietz (*Protagoras*, 154).

20. Dunn, "Protagoras."

21. For a survey of scholarship on this fragment, see Huss, "Homo-Mensura-Satz des Protagoras."

22. For a pithy review of interpretations, see Woodruff, "Rhetoric and Relativism," 302–4.

23. For a recent discussion, see Noël, "*Kairos* Sophistique"; see also note 29 to the present chapter.

24. On the pragmatic emphasis of Protagorean relativism, see Cole, "Relativism of Protagoras." Although Plato does not quote Protagoras, I assume (with most scholars) that his portrait here must have been recognizably Protagorean.

25. For Gorgias's "radical nihilism," see Robin, *Pensée grecque*, 177. For his "tragedy of knowledge," see Untersteiner, *Sophists*, 142–45.

26. Porter, "Seductions," 271.

27. There has been a tendency among critics to view Gorgias as either a serious philosopher or a playful rhetorician; see, for example, the survey in Newiger, *Untersuchungen*, 1–9. Newiger is among those who attempt to bridge the gap by making Gorgias a serious epistemologist, but I suspect Gorgias would prefer the contradiction to remain, to remind us that his playfulness is serious and his seriousness playful.

28. Thus Banu correctly notes ("Philosophie de Gorgias," pt. 1, 240–41) that Gorgias's interest in time is an expression of his interest in the human condition; I do not agree, however, that Gorgias can be seen as a positivist or "dogmatist."

29. There is thus a significant parallel between Gorgias's notion that the needs of the moment cannot be specified in advance and his argument that different types of excellence can be enumerated even though the term itself cannot be defined (B18 DK; cf. B19 and, for a similar view of rhetoric, B14). On the temporal urgency implied by Gorgias's *kairos*, compare Poulakos, "Toward a Sophistic Definition," 40. For a general discussion with speculation that interest in *kairos* reflected social upheaval, see Tortora, "Senso del *καῖρός*," especially 539.

30. In contrast, Banu ("Philosophie de Gorgias") reduces Gorgianic freedom to an endorsement of Periclean democracy.

31. The practical advantages promised by Protagoras in rhetoric and politics were provocatively counterintuitive; those promised by his successors were not.

32. In the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, D.J. Furley classes these important ethical fragments as “brief and undistinguished moral maxims” (“Democritus” 454).

33. Epicurus expressed this more clearly by saying that “time is an attribute of attributes, accompanying days and nights and hours and feelings and non-feelings and motions and rests” (Sextus Empiricus *Adv. Math.* 10.219, citing Demetrius the Laconian).

34. Compare Farrar, *Origins of Democratic Thinking*, especially 96–97.

35. For criticism of the fragments as commonplace platitudes, see Guthrie, *History*, 3:288–89; for the view that they are not genuine, see Havelock, *Liberal Temper*, 419–20. That Guthrie remains unimpressed by Antiphon’s work is clear from his statement that “no doubt Antiphon was not a profound philosopher” (*History*, 3:204).

36. The fragments are securely attributed to Antiphon and have been challenged only on subjective grounds as lacking intellectual rigor. They are less securely attributed to *Homonoia* in particular, but my argument does not require assigning them to this work of Antiphon rather than another.

37. Compare Epicurus in Stobaeus 3.16.29.

38. One need only think of Nausicaa looking forward to marriage in book 6 of the *Odyssey* and of Medea looking back on it in Euripides (*Medea* 230–51).

39. The fragments of Democritus do not explicitly state that it is best not to marry, but their emphasis on the troubles of marriage (B110, 273–74 D-K) and the horror of a woman in control (B111) point in that direction. For an attempt to assimilate Antiphon to Democritus, see Moulton, “Antiphon.”

40. Although tradition attributes *Homonoia* and *Aletheia* to “Antiphon the Sophist” and *Rhetorike Techne* and the *Tetralogies* to “Antiphon the orator,” a consensus is emerging that these are all the work of the same man. For single authorship, see J. S. Morrison, “Antiphon” (1961); Avery, “One Antiphon or Two?”; Gagarin, “Ancient Tradition”; Wiesner, “Antiphon.” For two Antiphons, see most recently Pendrick, *Antiphon*, 1–26.

41. Fragments of Antiphon’s *Rhetorike Techne* are cited from Blass and Thalheim, *Antiphon*. In fragment 71, Blass and Thalheim print Finck’s unnecessary emendation τὸν τῦπον for τὸν πόθον. This longing for what is gone has an excellent parallel in Gorgias’s *Epitaphios* (τοῖγαροῦν αὐτῶν ἀποθανόντων ὁ πόθος οὐ συνάπτεσθαι, B6, end D-K), to which Antiphon may be alluding.

42. The present, in other words, is not just closer or more immediate than the past or future but different in kind.

43. J. S. Morrison (“Antiphon” [1972], 214 and n. 107) suggests reading not ἡ οἴς εἰς ἀφανὲς ἦκει ὁ ἑλεγχος τῆς ἀληθείας (than things whose truth must be proven in the dark), but ἡ οἴς εἰς ἀφανὲς ἦκει ὁ ἑλεγχος τῆς ἀληθείας (than things which must be proven in the dark—from *Aletheia*). Gagarin (*Antiphon*, 82) accepts the attribution to *Aletheia*, adding (n. 45) that Morrison’s revised punctuation is unnecessary.

44. Reconstruction of the first part of this fragment remains uncertain, although that of Pendrick is less conjectural than Morrison’s. For discussion, see Pendrick, *Antiphon*, 246–51.

45. Such conclusions in Gagarin’s *Antiphon* (80–84) vitiate an otherwise sound and comprehensive survey.

46. Contrast, for example, Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology*, 429), who regards the (material) structure, or gestalt, of circular physiognomy and the (abstract) significance of a geometrical circle as simply viewing from different directions or points of view. Pendrick (*Antiphon*, 266–67) would like Antiphon’s argument to be an important contribution to the history of mathematics but cannot describe what it

might have been.

47. On the authenticity of this fragment, see Dunn, "Antiphon on Time."

48. Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno*, 169.

49. Antiphon's therapy booth is often considered apocryphal, especially since his "Griefery" in Corinth might be a comic caricature like Socrates' "Thinkery" in Aristophanes' *Clouds*: see J. S. Morrison, "Antiphon" (1972), 117 n. 6. But the story was at the very least based on Antiphon's practice of (somehow) treating mental distress. On Antiphon's nonjudgmental interest in feelings and emotions, see W. D. Furley, "Antiphon der Athener."

50. Compare the contemporary Hippocratics, whose radical materialism was devoted to healing the sick.

51. See D. J. Furley, "Antiphon's Case against Justice" 90. I otherwise follow Furley in seeing Antiphon as a critic of (conventionally defined) justice.

52. Contrast Ostwald, who reduces Antiphon's antidemocratic stance to "upper-class bias" (" *Nomos and Phusis*," 298). Hoffmann, who distinguishes the Sophist from the orator, believes that Antiphon was the Sophist most clearly supportive of the democracy (*Das Recht*, 409–10). His only evidence for this view is the fragment in which Antiphon argues that Greeks and barbarians cannot be distinguished by nature (B44B.2 D-K). It does not follow from this that Antiphon believed that rich and poor should have the same constitutional rights, any more than it follows that he thought slaves, metics, and foreigners should have full rights as citizens.

53. On the probable identity of the Sophist and the orator, see note 40 to the present chapter.

54. Part of the speech is preserved on papyrus (F1 B-T).

55. [Plutarch] *Moralia* 833A, 834A–B = T 1.11, 24 B-T.

CHAPTER 3

1. Vernant, "Historical Moment of Tragedy."

2. De Romilly, *Time in Greek Tragedy*, 7.

3. *Persians*, which took the recent Battle of Salamis as its subject, was preceded by Phrynichus's *Capture of Miletus* and *Phoenician Women*. Agathon's *Antheus*, in which all events and names were invented, was likewise not entirely alone, since Aristotle reports that this was true in several tragedies (ἐν ἐνίοις, *Poetics* 1451b21).

4. For a broad and suggestive distinction between the cyclical time of myth and the linear time of history and tragedy, see Del Corno, "I tragici greci e il passato."

5. This term is most commonly applied to *Ion*, *Helen*, *Electra*, and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*; see especially Solmsen, "Zur Gestaltung des Intriguenmotivs." See also Solmsen, "Euripides' *Ion*"; Matthiessen, *Elektra*, *Taurische Iphigenie und Helena*; and Diller, "Erwartung, Enttäuschung."

6. Aristotle *Poetics* 1451b21; compare note 3 to the present chapter

7. Herington (*Aeschylus*, 114) observes, "The search for causes and justifications which thus dominated the play naturally entails a vast sweep outward and backward from the dramatic place and dramatic time at which *Agamemnon* is set."

8. For a brief discussion of prior events in tragedy and their vivid portrayal in Aeschylus, see Roberts, "Outside the Drama," 145–46.

9. Segal (*Tragedy and Civilization*, 221) notes, "Oedipus, in the retrospective knowledge that parallels the forward movement of the plot, moves from adulthood back to infancy."

10. The closest Sophocles comes to exposition of the dramatic past by the chorus is in lines 497–530 of *Women of Trachis*, where the chorus repeats the story of the battle between Heracles and Nessus. But even in this play, all information about the

past is conveyed by dialogue and rhesis. The chorus repeats the story Deianeira herself told in the prologue (9–27), adding detail and immediacy (cf. 22–23) but no new information.

11. Segal (“Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*,” 156) notes that Deianeira’s “courage to search out and face the truth suggests the heroic determination of the hero of the *Oedipus Rex*.”

12. Goward (*Telling Tragedy*, 125) comments on Euripidean prologues and epilogues: “the framework creates a ‘play-pen’ within the confines of which a traditional story is liberated to make comparatively free and unpredictable movements.” On prologues and epilogues more generally, see Roberts, “Beginnings and Endings.”

13. The daughter of Tyndaris whose adultery kills the great warrior (Euripides *Electra* 479–81) seems at first to be Helen, who is responsible for Achilles’ death. Only in the following lines, as the chorus anticipates her own murder (483–86), does the reference shift to Clytemnestra’s infidelity and murder of Agamemnon.

14. For discussion of the ode, see Walsh, “First *Stasimon*.” Walsh speaks of “horrors that are concealed beneath the charm of the ode’s narrative” (288).

15. King (“Force of Tradition”) goes further, reading the chorus’s perspective back into an antiheroic Achilles.

16. Wright (*Euripides’ Escape-Tragedies*) takes a different approach, arguing that escape to a distant realm makes possible the philosophical depth of these plays.

17. For a general discussion of Euripidean prologues, see Strohm, “Zur Gestaltung euripideischer Prologreden.” Segal (“Tragic Beginnings”) discusses opening strategies in all three tragedians, arguing (104–10) that Euripides’ “detached” prologues are deliberately self-conscious.

18. On Sophoclean hints of the future, see Roberts, “Sophoclean Endings.”

19. The exception is Sophocles in his conclusion to *Philoctetes*.

20. On epilogue speeches and closure, see Dunn, *Tragedy’s End*, chap. 5. As I note there, the epilogue speaker generally fails to provide the “outsideness” of a privileged understanding of prior events, and this absence of outsideness reinforces the sense that time continues to elapse.

21. On this debate, see Croally, *Euripidean Polemic*, 134–62. Croally emphasizes the absence of an obvious winner.

22. For an entertaining account of Helen’s unknowability, see Austin, *Helen of Troy*.

23. It is of course possible that Menelaus and/or Helen invents the past in the *Odyssey*, but the discrepancy does not require this, and there is nothing in the context to suggest that this is so (Telemachus would then be treated to fictitious accounts of his father’s resourcefulness). In *Trojan Women*, by contrast, the discrepancy requires us to conclude that one or both women are lying.

24. On *Andromache* and the larger story it adapts, see Allan, *The “Andromache,”* 4–39. Allan also remarks on Orestes’ devious nature (24).

25. See Michelini, “Expansion of Myth,” 48–50; see also further discussion in Gibert, “Clytemnestra’s First Marriage.”

26. Sartre, *Nausea*, 130.

27. See, for example, Gregory, “Euripides’ *Heracles*” (on the hero’s dual parentage); Silk, “*Heracles*” (on his liminal status); Papadopoulou, *Heracles* (on his pervasive ambiguity).

28. Compare Papadopoulou, *Heracles*, 136–37.

29. On the hero’s double parentage, see especially Gregory, “Euripides’ *Heracles*.”

30. On the unknowable sequel to *Heracles*, see Dunn, “Ends and Means.” Critics regularly replace Theseus’s vague promise of future honors with a specific, present cult; thus Foley (*Ritual Irony*, 195) writes that *Heracles* finds “a permanent and

active place within the limits of a democratic *polis*.”

31. See Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” 7 and passim, for discussion of the novel’s attention to “the present in all its openendedness.”

32. Griffin, “Characterization,” 149.

33. The *Life of Aeschylus* remarks, “The plots of his dramas do not have many reversals and complications, as do those of more recent writers” (16–17). Compare the critique of Aeschylus’s silent characters by “Euripides” in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (911–13).

34. In this respect, *Persians* is sometimes likened to *Prometheus Bound*, whose protagonist remains immobile throughout the play; see Ireland, “Dramatic Structure.”

35. For *Trojan Women* as lyric lament, see Murray, “*Trojan Women*.” For the absence of plot or action, see Haigh, *Tragic Drama*, 300; Perrotta, “*Le Troiane*,” 237.

36. Wright (*Euripides’ Escape-Tragedies*, 59) discusses “surprise” and “shock effect” in *Helen* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, by which he refers not to events within the play but to novel choices of character (the chaste Helen) or setting (the Taurian Crimea).

37. *Life of Aeschylus* 9; Pollux 4.110.

38. Antigone’s promise makes the messenger’s report less surprising, but it does not necessarily follow that Antigone herself performed the first burial. On this vexed issue, see Whitehorne, “Background to Polyneices’ Disinterment,” with addendum.

39. Putting this another way, Goward (*Telling Tragedy*, 129) observes that temporary alternatives in Sophocles “acted largely as an ironic foil to reinforce the ultimate validity and authority of tradition,” while in Euripides “the twists and turns have broken free and can be exploited in a number of new ways.”

40. Hence Aristotle objects that the scene is irrational (*Poetics* 1461b20). It is possible, however, that he refers not to *Medea* but to the lost *Aegeus*: ὥςπερ ἐν ὀπίσθητι αἰγεί (cf. Mastronarde, *Euripides*, 282).

41. My discussion here of unexpected developments in the plot complements Arnott’s discussion, in “Euripides and the Unexpected,” of play with mythical and theatrical conventions. On the intrigue plays, see note 5 to the present chapter.

42. Hamilton (“Prologue Prophecy”) discusses such partially fulfilled prophecies chiefly as a means of generating suspense.

43. In a useful discussion in “Wahrscheinlich,” Hose shows that characters in late fifth-century drama are generally less successful than characters in earlier periods in trying to understand the past or determine the future.

44. For plot uncertainty in the *Iliad*, see J. V. Morrison’s *Homeric Misdirection*. Morrison applies the term *misdirection* to plot uncertainties substantially less pronounced than those discussed here.

45. See Arnott, “Red Herrings” and “Euripides and the Unexpected.”

46. If the preparations for death are surprising, even shocking, it does not follow that they are impious and warrant punishment, as Burnett assumes (*Catastrophe Survived*, 159–66).

47. The so-called deception speech of Ajax, however much it confounds critics, is not a blind alley, since it does not explicitly suggest a direction for the plot (i.e., suicide) that subsequently evaporates. For discussion of this speech in Sophocles’ *Ajax*, see Gibert, *Change of Mind*, 120–35.

48. On the indeterminate plot of this play, see Roberts, “Different Stories”; Hoppin, “Metrical Effects.” On its concern with Neoptolemus’s character, see Blondell, “*Phusis* of Neoptolemus.” Returning the bow to its owner is a striking gesture of altruism, as Kosak observes (“Therapeutic Touch”), not a calculation of mutual advantage, as Rose implies (*Sons of the Gods*, 301–5).

49. On this scene, compare Arnott’s account in “Red Herrings” (4–5).

50. Mendelsohn, *Gender and the City*, 132. As Mendelsohn notes earlier (123–26), by harming the city to advance her personal revenge, Hecuba reverses the prior self-sacrifice by Makaria on behalf of Athens.

51. Hence it is tempting to alter the text and remove one of these paths, as in Diggle's Oxford Classical Text, which brackets lines 1582–1766. For fuller discussion, see Dunn, *Tragedy's End*, chap. 11.

52. Aristotle *Poetics* 1454a32.

53. The surprisingness of a change of mind is not addressed by Gibert in *Change of Mind*.

54. Easterling ("Presentation of Character," 25) explains, "The carpet scene brings upon the stage an Agamemnon whose blindness recalls the Chorus's description of his behaviour at Aulis."

55. If the play is not by Aeschylus, this example still helps to illustrate Euripidean technique by contrast.

56. For some critical reactions to the scene, see Easterling, "Constructing Character," 95–96.

57. Compare Odysseus in *Ajax*, who voiced respect for his enemy in the opening scene with Athena and surprises us at the end with the timing of his entrance to endorse his burial.

58. Knox, *Word and Action*, 237; compare, in a similar vein, Schein, "Heracles."

59. Lines 1056–80 are deleted (wrongly) by Diggle, following Reeve ("Euripides, *Medea* 1021–80"); for a more balanced discussion, see Seidensticker, "Euripides, *Medea* 1056–80."

60. Compare Knox, "*Medea*," 201, on Medea's internal conflict.

61. I therefore disagree with John Gould, who generalizes that a realistic concern with time is "discarded" in Greek tragedy ("Dramatic Character," 48–49).

62. The quoted phrase was memorably applied to the secular world of the novel by Kermode (*Sense of an Ending*, 8).

63. Studies along these lines include J. V. Morrison's *Homeric Misdirection*, on the *Iliad*, and de Jong's *Narratological Commentary on the "Odyssey."*

64. For a useful comparison concentrating on the recognition scenes, see Solmsen, "Electra and Orestes."

65. Compare, for example, Kitto, *Greek Tragedy*, 86.

66. Goward (*Telling Tragedy*, 60) notes that it is "typical of Aeschylus to delay definitive action" and instead provide glimpses of past and future "crucial to gaining an understanding of the present."

67. Goward (*Telling Tragedy*, 103–18) reads this series of delays, or *doloi*, primarily for their effect on the audience.

68. For a fuller discussion of this revision, see Bond, *Euripides*, 89–91, on lines 105f.

69. For discussion, see Padel, "Imagery of the Elsewhere." There is a briefer wish to escape in *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (1089–1105), and there are passing wishes in Sophocles (*Oedipus at Colonus* 1081–84; fr. 476 *TrGF*).

70. On free speech in democratic Athens, see Bonner, *Aspects of Athenian Democracy*, 67–85; for a broader overview, see Sluiter and Rosen, *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity*.

71. Hence there is an obvious contrast with Sophocles' Oedipus, who is shown onstage recoiling at having committed unwitting incest. Less scandalous but at least as bold is the freedom of Hecuba the slave. When Agamemnon says he cannot help her for fear of the army, Hecuba first replies: "Well! Then there is no human who is free, but each is a slave of possession or chance!" (Euripides *Hecuba* 863–65). She then changes tack and proposes that if he will agree to her scheme, she will "set him free" from his fear of the army (869).

72. For discussion, see Dunn, “Comic and Tragic License.”
73. For discussion, see Yunis, *New Creed*, 139–71; Dunn, “Ends and Means.”
74. For Pericles’ emphasis on the present, compare Rusten, *Thucydides*, 136, 141–
42. See also the discussion in the epilogue to the present study.
75. See Dunn, *Tragedy’s End*, chap. 3.
76. See Walsh, “Rhetoric of Birthright”; on one Athenian myth, see Loraux, “Kreousa.”
77. See, for example, Dunn “Battle of the Sexes.”
78. See the trenchant discussion of Erbse in “Der Gott von Delphi.”
79. Knox, “Euripidean Comedy,” 260.
80. Compare Lloyd, “Divine and Human Action,” 38.
81. Scholars tend to ignore these continuing complications; for example, Lloyd (“Divine and Human Action,” 44–45) compares the happy ending of *Ion* to that of *Eumenides*.
82. The passage is quoted twice earlier in this chapter, in the sections titled “The Voice of the Past” and “The Present Context.”
83. Hence some critics wish to bring order to the scene, a desire rightly rejected by Knox in “Euripides” *Iphigenia*.
84. For an influential attempt to recover a pure ethical moment, see Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 32–38.
85. Compare Mellert-Hoffmann, *Untersuchungen*, 35.
86. For a mythological, rather than imperial, reading of this irony, see Sorum, “Myth, Choice, and Meaning,” 540–42.

CHAPTER 4

1. On the conventional aspects of the opening sentence of Thucydides’ *History* and the claim for the work’s importance, see Gomme, *Historical Commentary*; Hornblower, *Commentary*, ad loc. For a deconstruction of the opening sentence’s claims, see Loraux, “Thucydide a écrit.”
2. Although Hornblower notes that Thucydides “sat down to record a set of events which were still in the future” (*Commentary*, on 1.1.1), the critic does not explore the programmatic nature of this announcement.
3. On this as the correct general sense, see Canfora, “Préface de Thucydide.” The analysts’ concern with identifying when he wrote or revised individual passages need not detain us here.
4. See Von Leyden’s “Spatium Historicum”; compare note 24 to the present chapter.
5. For discussions of the authority of the past in Greek literature and visual arts, see, respectively, van Groningen, *In the Grip of the Past*; Foxhall, “Monumental Ambitions.”
6. On the historical method set forth in Thucydides’ “Archaeology,” see V. Hunter, *Past and Process*, 17–49; on his rhetorical appeal to a Panhellenic audience, see Howie, “Thucydides’ Einstellung.”
7. Thucydides’ text reads: “since the past is hard to trust, even with every piece of evidence in turn.” Hornblower (*Commentary*) would like to make the grammar reflect his own methodological interests, arguing that the construction ought to be χαλεποῦ ὄντος. This is wishful thinking; Thucydides makes a clear statement about the nature of the past (τὰ... παλαιὰ... χαλεπὰ ὄντα), whereas Hornblower would like a statement about historical method in general (χαλεποῦ ὄντος πιστεύσαι).
8. The calendar months of the Greek cities were all lunar and were therefore roughly coterminous, but they often diverged by several days, and they carried

different names in different cities. On lunar regulation of the calendar, see Dunn, “Tampering with the Calendar”; for the month names, see Samuel, *Greek and Roman Chronology*, 57–138.

9. There can be little doubt that Thucydides knew of the astronomical division of seasons by solstice and equinox, but despite Smart’s assertions (“Thucydides and Hellenicus,” 24), he neither imposes a strict seasonal scheme nor draws attention to its novelty, as he does for the scheme of war years.

10. Marincola (*Authority and Tradition*, 67–69) reminds us that it does not follow for Thucydides that autopsy is infallible.

11. On Tolstoy’s serial publication, see Morson, *Narrative and Freedom*, 169–71; on serialized novels more generally, see Davis, “Social History.”

12. In this respect, Thucydides was unlike his successors, with the exception of Xenophon in the earlier books of *Hellenica*, which follow directly on the end of Thucydides’ *History*.

13. Dewald, *Thucydides’ War Narrative*, 35.

14. This is not the place to consider the metanarrative future in Thucydides—that is, the use that future readers will make of the work (1.22.4)—except to observe that his documentation of the present as an aid to future observers has an analogue in the case histories medical doctors compiled to help future practitioners. Compare Thucydides 2.48 (on the plague) and the discussions by Carratelli (“Ippocrate”) and Hornblower (*Thucydides* [1987], 132–34). On medical practice, see the section titled “Chance and Necessity” in [chapter 5](#)

15. For a fuller discussion of such passages, see Gribble, “Narrator Interventions.” Gribble distinguishes among those that arouse pathos, enable understanding, and serve as paradigm.

16. Rood (*Thucydides*, 4) observes: “where Thucydides does intervene most conspicuously, he offers not statistical or synchronic overviews, as might modern historians, but condensed, ethically charged, glimpses of the future.”

17. Kitto, *Poiesis*, 299.

18. Kitto, *Poiesis*, 298.

19. Connor, “Narrative Discourse,” 15, 10.

20. In “Preface to Thucydides,” Morrison describes Thucydides’ irony as “‘training’ for the reader” (123); cf. *Reading Thucydides* 154.

21. J. V. Morrison, “Preface to Thucydides,” 127; cf. *Reading Thucydides*, 164–65.

22. In a very different approach to the present, Lowell Edmunds (“Thucydides in the Act of Writing”) shows that when the historian speaks of himself as an author of the text, he uses the first person and either the present tense or present perfective. Edmunds argues that Thucydides thus creates a textual *nunc*, a timeless present that is a product of the “new” technology of writing.

23. For other epic features of the poem, see Krischer, “Herodots Prooimion.”

24. Virginia Hunter (*Past and Process*, [chap. 2](#)) discusses Herodotus’s discovery of “historical space,” following von Leyden (“Spatium Historicum”) and Shimron (“ $\pi\rho\omicron\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\upsilon\varsigma\ \eta\mu\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \iota\delta\mu\epsilon\nu$ ”). This spatial metaphor seems to deflect attention from temporality: von Leyden observes, “there is no need for us to consider here Thucydides’ attitude towards the present” (“Spatium Historicum,” 101).

25. For a good discussion of Homer’s beginning, see Rabel, “Chryses.”

26. Munson (*Ananke* 36) characterizes this as “despotic” compulsion.

27. Munson (*Ananke* 34) suggests that divine necessity in this case arises from within, from Candaules’ ethos or predisposition.

28. There is a great deal of scholarship on this passage, chiefly concerned with historical (rather than narrative) method and generally divided between those who take *prophasis* to mean “allegation” by participants (e.g., Orwin, *Humanity of Thucydides*, 32–38) and those who take it as Thucydides’ view of “cause” (e.g.,

Hornblower, *Commentary*, ad loc.).

29. Kagan (*Origins of War*, 19) observes, “No one could have predicted that an internal quarrel in this remote city on the fringes of the Hellenic world would lead to the terrible and devastating Peloponnesian War.”

30. There are earlier precedents in the topographical introductions used in the *Odyssey* by Eumaeus to tell Odysseus of his childhood (Νῆϊός τις Συρίη κυκλῆσκειται, 15.403) and by Odysseus to tell his false tale to Penelope (Κκῆ, 19.172). For discussion, see Hornblower, *Commentary*, on 1.24.1.

31. This section of Thucydides’ narrative has recently been analyzed at length by Stahl (“Narrative Unity,” 301–20), who prefers to emphasize the “unifying effect” (308) of following events to an unforeseen outcome.

32. According to Bakker (“Verbal Aspect,” 7), the shift from aorist to imperfect in Thucydides brings with it a vividness, or *enargeia*, that he describes as an “internal point of view”; in the same volume, Sicking and Stork (“Grammar”) argue that the effect of the historical present in general is not to provide vividness but to isolate the main narrative thread.

33. Rood likewise observes that in the account of events leading to civil war in Corcyra (3.70–81), “instead of correlating developments at Corcyra with the deliberations they inspired in Athens and Sparta, Thucydides mentions embassies and fleets only when they arrive” (*Thucydides*, 115); Rood concludes, however, not that the reader is immersed in the course of events but that Thucydides wants to demonstrate “how war encourages local tensions” (117).

34. As J. V. Morrison observes (“Preface to Thucydides,” 110), Thucydides’ narrative calls on readers to “listen, assess, and—by extension—make a decision.”

35. On the competing and overlapping demands of justice and necessity in these speeches, see Orwin, *Humanity of Thucydides*, 38–41.

36. On the unusual defensive alliance, later to become more common, see de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, 328.

37. For J. V. Morrison (“Preface to Thucydides,” 123), the arrival of Athenian reinforcements best exemplifies Thucydides’ narrative technique, since the reader is as surprised as the Corinthians.

38. Shrimpton (*History and Memory*, 190–95) proposes that Thucydides’ novel and idiosyncratic scheme be understood in terms of traditional, oral methods for remembering past events, yet the mnemonic techniques he cites (ease of recollection; affective or emotional, rather than rational, structure) are exactly the opposite of Thucydides’ preference for breaking up longer episodes and for numerical, rather than affective, structure (i.e., “year two” rather than “the year of the plague”). The exhaustive analysis in Shrimpton’s second appendix (266–86) shows an Athenian perspective in reporting the Archidamian War but fails to show how this aids memorization.

39. Dewald (*Thucydides’ War Narrative*, 28–30) uses the latter part of Thucydides’ book 3 to show how discrete units begin with similar formulaic sentences, arguing that this repetition imparts narrative coherence (33).

40. Finley, *Thucydides*, 103–6.

41. The eight books of Thucydides offer 198 uses of the word, compared to 102 in the nine books of Herodotus. All occurrences of the participle in Thucydides are classified into four categories in Bétant, *Lexicon*, 2:290–92.

42. See especially Dover, “Anapsephisis”; Hansen, *Athenian Assembly*, 86–88. See also Hornblower, *Commentary*, on 1.44.1, 3.36.6. The fact that two meetings of the assembly are involved is noted in passing by Connor (*Thucydides*, 162 n.11) and Ober (*Political Dissent*, 107 n. 99).

43. The three moments of indecision I describe coincide with the three broader clusters of speeches noted by Cogan (*Human Thing*, especially 125–28); I am less

confident than Cogan that these narrative turning points necessarily correspond to objective turning points in the course of the war.

44. Cogan, *Human Thing*, xiv.

45. For the view that speeches embody the historian's universal deductions, see Hammond, "The Particular and the Universal." Von Leyden ("Spatium Historicum," 102) more briefly observes that the speeches in Thucydides "are purged of the irrelevancies of the 'here' and 'now' of actual speeches."

46. Cogan, *Human Thing*, 6.

47. For the view that the speeches provide access to the thought of Thucydides, see Kennedy, introduction to *The Speeches of Thucydides*.

48. The notion of necessary or inevitable historical change comes to the fore in eighteenth-century thought, as Meier notes (*Greek Discovery*, 176–85); contra Meier (185 and n. 130), however, it does not follow that, lacking such a notion, the Greeks in general and Thucydides in particular saw their world as static.

49. In particular, Thucydides does not subscribe to a cataclysmic model in which momentous change transforms the world; for such a model, see the discussion of *Prometheus* in [chapter 5](#) of the present study.

50. In [chapters 4](#) and [6](#) of *Past and Process*, Hunter gives an illuminating discussion of what she calls "process" and I call tendencies; the fact that these tendencies reappear does not demonstrate that their movement is, as Hunter argues, "inexorable" (165) or "inevitable" (231).

51. The Athenian ambassadors in Thucydides reject such notions largely because of their materialism. This radical materialism, often dubbed the "Athenian thesis" that action is and should be dictated by self-interest, used to be taken as a hallmark of Thucydides' scientific methodology, but more recent approaches tend to complicate this view. Orwin (*Humanity of Thucydides*), for example, argues that the law of necessity implied by the Athenian thesis is accompanied by a serious and genuine interest in justice, while Crane (*Thucydides*) deconstructs the Athenian thesis, arguing that the ideology of materialism involves a nostalgia for the simplicity of aristocratic values. In the present chapter, I argue that the radical materialism of the Athenians undermines their own imperial ideology. In [chapter 5](#) of the present study, I address some other forms of materialism.

52. Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence*; compare de Romilly, "Prévisions non Vérifiées," on expectations not realized in the narrative. It does not follow that, as Edmunds implies, Thucydides longed for a (quasi-Platonic) world in which reason and intelligence have absolute sway. As I argue in the present chapter, Thucydides values the ability to adapt to and make use of change, not an ability to defy or overcome it.

53. It will by now be evident that, in exploring the attitudes of Thucydidean agents, I am not concerned with "ethics" as traditional moral belief; for such an approach, see Williams, *Ethics in Thucydides*.

54. See, for example, Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*; V. Hunter, *Thucydides the Artful Reporter*; Connor, "Post Modernist Thucydides?"; Hornblower, *Thucydides* (1987); Crane, *Thucydides*. As an interesting example of the latter tendency, see Shrimpton's argument in "Accuracy" that Thucydides' interest in accuracy, or *akribeia*, reflects elitist ideology.

55. But a readiness to take the plunge does not always come easily. Thucydides spends four chapters (2.14–17) describing the traumatic change involved when the Athenians, at the outbreak of the war, were persuaded to move their households inside the city walls: "with heavy hearts and with great difficulty they left behind their households and the ancestral shrines that had always been theirs from the city's beginnings, preparing to change their way of life and leave behind nothing less than each person's city" (2.16.2).

56. For a wide-ranging but reductive contrast between the values of “aristocratic” past and “democratic” present, see Csapo and Miller, “Democracy, Empire, and Art.”

57. Ober (*Political Dissent*, chap. 2) gives a good account of Thucydides’ critical stance but assumes too easily that Thucydides means his reader to contrast the difficulties and errors of political deliberation with a “truth” evident to the historian.

CHAPTER 5

1. For an excellent survey of such discussions, see Cole, *Democritus*, 1–10.

2. As the examples and discussion in the present chapter make clear, the fifth century’s interest in cultural origins and development was widespread (by no means restricted to the Sophists) and varied (by no means uniformly progressive), despite Rose’s assumptions to the contrary (*Sons of the Gods*, 266–330).

3. My discussion does not rely on authorship by Aeschylus, which has been challenged by M. Griffith and M. L. West. Those who accept attribution to Aeschylus tend to place the play late in his career (see, e.g., Herington, *Author*, 119); Griffith (*Authenticity*, 253) and West (*Studies in Aeschylus*, 53) place it in the 440s or 430s.

4. Sihvola (*Decay, Progress*, pt. 1, especially 62) attempts to exclude from Hesiod any change at all, by arguing that the progression of five races is symbolic. Blundell (*Origins*, 142–43) excludes change by arguing that the significant contrast is between a divine past and a human present.

5. So argue Sihvola (*Decay, Progress*, 3) and Meier (“Ancient Equivalent,” 189).

6. Compare Euripides’ *Suppliant Women* 201–16, where improvements are successive, as in Sophocles, but are ascribed to the gods, much as in *Prometheus*.

7. See, for example, Edelstein, *Idea of Progress*, 3–19; Dodds, “Ancient Concept of Progress,” 4.

8. For a general discussion, see Ehrenberg, “Foundation of Thurii.”

9. For an attempt to deal with these problems, see Cole, “Relativism of Protagoras.”

10. For other thought experiments, see Gera, “Two Thought Experiments.”

11. This is roughly equivalent to the notion of growth, or *auxesis*, that Meier (“Ancient Equivalent,” 191–204) locates in the fifth century.

12. For a full discussion, see Davies, “Sisyphus and the Invention.”

13. On this apparent digression as an introduction to Thucydides’ themes and methods, see Connor, *Thucydides*, 20–32; Tsakmakis, *Thukydides*, 25–62.

14. See especially den Boer, *Progress*; den Boer rejects attempts to uncover a story of progress in the “Archaeology.”

15. V. Hunter, *Past and Present*, especially 45–49.

16. On affinities between Thucydides and Democritus in their views of chance and of ethics, see, respectively, Herter, “Thukydides”; Hussey, “Thucydidean History.”

17. For an ambitious reconstruction of Democritus’s views, see Cole, *Democritus*.

18. For a discussion of world formation in Democritus, see Guthrie, *History*, 2:404–13; Guthrie notes in particular the organic pattern involved (408).

19. Hirsch (“War Demokrits Weltbild?”) argues that it is wrong to consider Democritus “anti-teleological,” both because the term is anachronistic (clear and explicit definitions of teleology begin with Aristotle) and because some of Democritus’s arguments involve an implicit notion of teleology.

20. The explicit teleology of Sophocles and the implicit teleology of Democritus both illustrate the natural growth, or *auxesis*, that Meier (“Ancient Equivalent,” 186–221) takes as a hallmark of ancient notions of progress. Unfortunately, Meier’s reductive dichotomy between ancient and modern ideas cannot accommodate more

unpredictable trajectories, such as those described by Thucydides or explained by the author of *Ancient Medicine*.

21. I follow the numeration by chapter and sentence of Jouanna's *Hippocrates: De l'Ancienne Médecine*, and I follow his text in most cases.

22. As Jouanna puts it, by comparison with other Hippocratic treatises, "the author of *On Ancient Medicine* is remarkable for his gradualist and open view of the evolution of the art" (*Hippocrates* [1999], 238).

23. On the originality of this heuristic method, see Miller, " *Technê* and Discovery."

24. Blundell, citing *Ancient Medicine*, states that "some of the most unequivocal examples of classical Greek progressivism exist for us in the medical literature" (*Origins*, 178). For similar arguments, see Dodds, "Ancient Concept of Progress," 11; Festugière, *Hippocrates*, 35. Conversely, those who want to debunk the notion of fifth-century progressivism regard *Ancient Medicine* as typical of an inchoate or incomplete idea of progress: see Edelstein, *Idea of Progress*, 33–34; den Boer, *Progress*, 49–50. Miller (" *On Ancient Medicine*," especially 190–98) gives a more positive assessment of the author's originality, arguing that he has effectively adapted Democritean theory to the story of human diet.

25. Herter, "Kulturhistorische Theorie" 470; compare Jouanna, *Hippocrates* (1999), 232.

26. Jouanna, *Hippocrates* (1999), 236–37; compare Jouanna, *Hippocrates: De l'Ancienne Médecine*, 41.

27. Edelstein, *Idea of Progress*, 38. Vickers ("Naive Empiricism," 1, 8) perhaps exaggerates in implying that most scholars consider our author a naive or commonsense empiricist; see the discussion that follows in the present chapter.

28. The boldness of this opening assertion is often diluted by translators who restrict error to a smaller class. Jones's translation (*Hippocrates*) reads, "All who, on attempting to speak or to write on medicine, have assumed for themselves a postulate as a basis for their discussion... obviously blunder," as if reading not ὁ κόσμος μὲν ἐπιχειροῦσαν περὶ ἰητρικῆς λέγειν ἢ γράφειν ὑπόθεσιν αὐτοῖς αὐτοῖς ὑποθέμενοι... καταφανεῖς εἰς ἁμαρτάνοντες but, rather, ὁ κόσμος μὲν ἐπιχειροῦσιν περὶ ἰητρικῆς λέγειν ἢ γράφειν ὑπόθεσιν ὑπέθεσαν... εἰς ἁμαρτάνοντες. Jouanna (*Hippocrates: De l'Ancienne Médecine*) likewise reverses the main verb and the participle. Chadwick and Mann ("Tradition in Medicine") offer a more accurate translation: "In all previous attempts to speak or write about medicine, the authors have introduced certain arbitrary postulates..."

29. This rhetorical inflation makes it less likely that the author is attacking one individual than that he is broadly contrasting general methods. Lloyd ("Who Is Attacked?") argues for a polemic against Philolaus, whereas Schiefky (" *On Ancient Medicine* ") argues that the author rejects the developmentalism of cosmologists, such as Empedocles.

30. The author may have meant "an empty supposition [ὑπόθεσις]; the manuscripts give either καὶνῆς (A) or κενῆς (M).

31. For the treatise's general affinities with sophistic ideas, see Wanner, "Studien," 81–92. Wanner concludes, however, that the author is not an original thinker but a practical doctor who has absorbed some contemporary ideas.

32. De Romilly, *Great Sophists*, chaps. 6–7.

33. Wanner ("Studien," 81–92) notes sophistic ideas in the treatise and considers them unoriginal borrowing by a practical doctor; Heinimann ("Vorplatonische Theorie") is exclusively concerned with comparable attempts to theorize *technê*.

34. Wenskus ("Die Rolle des Zufalls") uses the final words of this passage (θαυμάζειν τὰ ἐξευρημένα, ὥς καλῶς καὶ ὀρθῶς ἐξεύρηται καὶ οὐκ ἀπὸ τῆς χηρῆς) to draw

a strict distinction between chance in events and chance in *technē* and to argue that the author is responding to the use of a similar phrase in *Affections* 45. This goes too far. As the context in *Ancient Medicine* makes clear, chance and uncertainty cannot be eliminated in the *technē* of medicine; given this rather loose expression (where οὐκ ἄπο τύχης means “with as little dependence on chance as possible”), it is more likely that *Affections* 45 is an attempt to improve on *Ancient Medicine* (by distinguishing aspects of the *technē* that depend on chance from those that do not).

35. See Cole, *Democritus*, 30 (trial and error), 47 (naturalistic progress), 131 (unique to the late fifth century).

36. Miller (“On Ancient Medicine”) emphasizes the work’s utilitarian interest in need (χρεῖα) and usefulness (τὸ συμφέρον) and its general similarities with Democritus but does not explore their differences. The argument for affinities with Democritus is further developed by Herter, “Kulturhistorische Theorie.”

37. Examples are the sculptural *Canon* of Polykleitos in the visual arts and the musical theories of Damon in the performing arts.

38. Meier, “Ancient Equivalent,” 210.

39. Lewis, “Alternative Date”; Creon is named στρατηγός in line 8 of the play.

40. Herodotus mentions that Xerxes passed through Abdera on his way to Greece (7.109) and also on his return, having a special friendship with the city (8.120); Diogenes Laertius claims that Xerxes was entertained by Democritus’s father and that Democritus learned astronomy from the Persians on this occasion (9.34).

ΕΠΙΛΟΓΗ

1. Loraux, *Invention of Athens* 131.

2. The unusual nature of this oration is signaled in the very first words, where Pericles disputes the value of this ancestral practice: “I myself would have thought it sufficient that the honors for those who proved good in deed be presented by deed as well... rather than that the virtues of many men depend for their credibility on whether one man speaks well or poorly” (2.35). This disavowal is not empty rhetoric but anticipates Pericles’ repeated departure from the commonplaces of funeral oratory.

3. Rusten, *Thucydides*, 141–42.

4. Ziolkowski (*Thucydides*, 182–85, 188) concludes his monograph on this oration by observing that praise of the present rather than the past is Thucydides’ most striking innovation: not only does he omit the customary catalog of glorious events in Athenian history, but he devotes the longest and most important section of such orations, the *epainos*, to praise of contemporary Athens.

5. The authenticity of this speech has been challenged by some critics but has more often been defended; for a brief summary of positions on this speech and that of Demosthenes, see Frangeskou, “Tradition and Originality,” 317 nn. 9–10. My argument is not affected by this question, since I am concerned with rhetorical strategies deemed appropriate for the occasion, not with the identity of author and/or speaker.

6. The authenticity of this speech has been challenged by some critics and is bracketed in Rennie’s Oxford text (1931). For a recent argument in its favor, see Worthington, “Authorship”; compare note 5 to the present chapter.

7. Kallet-Marx, “Thucydides 2.45.2.”

8. Gomme (*Historical Commentary*, ad loc.) states that “there is a bleakness in the personal consolation of the parents, children, and widows of the fallen (from 44.3 to 45) which is in marked contrast to the warmth and splendour of all the rest of the

speech.” Loraux (*Invention of Athens*, 113) notes that “many commentators have been indignant at the coldness of [Pericles’] argumentation”; she agrees, adding that all the other *epitaphioi* “dwell more readily on consolation.” Rusten (*Thucydides*, commentary on 44–46) says that “Pericles’ attempt at [consolation]... is brief and... inadequate” and “his words austere,” adding that Pericles expresses less sympathy than does Lysias. Eide (“Thucydides’ λόγος,” 33) cites similar views from some earlier scholars (“tasteless,” “depressing,” “cold comfort,” “hollow and empty exhortations”); unfortunately, his own attempt to find parallels in philosophical consolations leads to the conclusion that “we simply have to accept the grotesque and callous as part of the genre” (39).

9. The tendency to translate οὐκ ὀφείλωμαι as “I have no pity” (Rusten) or “I shall not commiserate” (Warner) may have reinforced negative views of the passage as a whole. However, the verb, when used with a personal object, simply means “lament over.” LSJ (s.v. II, with the translation “lament over, bewail”) cites three examples from poetry (*Od.* 19.522, *S. El.* 148, *E. Rh.* 896), all involving the death of a woman’s son, and three examples from prose (*Hdt.* 5.4, this passage, *Lys.* 2.37; to which add *Lys.* 2.71 with reflexive object), all involving living persons in great misfortune; with a personal object, the verb should therefore be translated “lament at someone’s death or misfortune.” LSJ lists separately the special Homeric use of the word for gods heeding the misfortune of mortals (s.v. II.2, with the translation “pity”).

10. Rusten, “Structure, Style, and Sense,” 75–76.

11. Gomme (*Historical Commentary*, on 45.2) refers to the “warmth and splendour of all the rest of the speech in which the greatness of the city and the opportunities and qualities of the citizens are lauded.”

12. See discussion and references to Antiphon in [chapter 2](#) of the present study.

13. Inscriptions giving a date *kata theon* are listed in Pritchett and Neugebauer (*Calendars of Athens*, 15) and updated by Pritchett (“Calendars on Stone,” 337) and Meritt (“Calendar Problems,” 231 n. 109). For my argument that these dates indicate conjunction, see Dunn, “Tampering with the Calendar,” 222–25.

14. Moulton, *Menander*, xxii; the passage’s affinity with Euripides is strengthened by its tragic overtones, noted by Handley (*The “Dyskolos,”* 252).

15. Cole, *Democritus*, 173.

16. Cole, *Democritus*, 173.

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Passages Cited

Note: Pages where major discussions appear are in bold.

Aeschylus

Agamemnon

218 21: **103**

218 37: **68**

221: **108**

223 24: **108**

248: **68**

Libation Bearers

119 21: **97**

900 902: **97**

Prometheus Bound

250 54: **154**

443 44: **152**

448 50: **153**

480 83: **152**

505 6: **152**

Anaxagoras (59 D-K)

B4: **43**

B6: **43, 44**

B7: **44**

B12: [43](#), [44](#)

B13: [43](#)

B17: [43](#)

Anonymus Iamblichi (89 D-K)

6.1: [177](#)

Antiphon (87 D-K)

A6: [62](#)

A6: [62](#)

Aletheia

B1: [60](#)

B2: [61](#)

B4: [60](#)

B5: [60](#)

B9: [61](#)

B44A.3.25 4.8: [63](#)

Homonoia

B49.1 8: [58](#)

B49.25 32: [58](#) [59](#)

B50: [57](#)

B51: [57](#)

B52: [57](#)

B53a: [58](#)

B77: [58](#)

35 B-T (*Aletheia?*): [60](#)

Art of Rhetoric

71 B-T: [59](#)

72 B-T: [60](#)

Aristophanes

Birds

1499 500: [14](#)

Clouds

612 26: [25](#) [26](#)

1365 76: [1](#)

Frogs

948 52: [100](#)

959 63: [101](#)

Aristotle

Physics

1.4, 187a23 25: [43](#)

XMG

979b20 26: [50](#)

Critias, F19 *TrGF*

1 8: [159](#) - [60](#)

9 15: [160](#)

Democritus (68 D-K)

A40: [164](#)

A72: [56](#)

B187: [55](#)

B189: [55](#)

B200: [55](#)

B201: [55](#)

B202: [55](#)

B230: [55](#)

B246: [55](#)

B247: [57](#)

B251: [56](#)

B252: [56](#)

B275: [54](#)

B285: [54](#), [55](#)

B294: [54](#)

B295: [54](#)

B296: [54](#)

Demosthenes, *Or.* 60

32.3 4: [185](#)

36.3 6: [185](#) [86](#)

37.1 2: [186](#)

Diodorus

1.8: [163](#) [64](#)

Diogenes Laertius

9.52: [45](#) [46](#)

Dionysius of Halicarnassus

Letter to Pompey

381: [134](#)

On Thucydides

9: 30, [133](#)

Dissoi Logoi (90 D-K)

2.20: [48](#)

Empedocles (31 D-K)

B17.6 8: [42](#)

B17.12 13: [42](#)

B17.34 45: [42](#)

Euripides

Andromache

1 15: [74](#)

Electra

15 28: [75](#)

432 33: [71](#)

737 46: [72](#)

1276 87: [76](#)

Helen

1478 84: [99](#) [100](#)

Heracles

13 25: [80](#)

84 89: [99](#)

104 6: [99](#)

151 64: [80](#) [81](#)

177 99: [81](#) [82](#)

348 56: [82 83](#)

425 35: [83](#)

1255 89: [83 84](#)

Hippolytus

732 37: [99](#)

Ion

6 7: [104](#)

66 73: [104 5](#)

588 606: [106](#)

1557 59: [105](#)

Iphigenia at Aulis

1 5: [107](#)

21: [107](#)

22 27: [107](#)

442 43: [108](#)

446 50: [108](#)

1375 84: [109](#)

1398 401: [110](#)

Medea

1 11: [74 75](#)

Orestes

190: [91](#)

201 5: [91](#)

Gorgias (82 D-K)

A1a: 53

B3: 50

B6: 53

B11.11 (*Helen*): 51

B11a.34 (*Palamedes*): 52

B19: 52

B23: 51

Hellanicus (4 *FGrH*)

F 47a: 32

F 79b: 31

Heraclitus (22 D-K)

B36: 39

B52: 39, 57

B62: 39

B91: 39

B124: 39

Herodotus

1.proem: 118

1.3: 29

1.5.3: 119

1.5.4: 119, 142

1.6.1 2: 124

1.7.1

120

1.8.2: [122](#)

1.11.2 3: [121](#)

1.11.3: [121](#)

1.13.2: [122](#)

3.104: [13](#), [14](#)

4.181: [14](#)

5.59: [29](#)

5.60: [29](#)

7.171: [29](#)

7.215: [14](#)

8.8.1: [138](#) [39](#)

8.50: [135](#)

8.51: [30](#)

8.56: [135](#)

8.70.2 71.1: [135](#)

8.71.1: [135](#)

8.74.1 2: [136](#)

Hesiod

Theogony

38: [46](#)

Works and Days

158 60: [27](#)

180 81: [153](#)

280 85: [38](#)

383 87: [18](#)

483 84: [38](#)

609 14: [38](#)

Hippocratic Corpus, *Ancient Medicine*

1.1: [169](#)

1.3: [170](#)

2.1: [168](#)

3.1 3: [166](#)

3.3 4: [167](#)

3.4 5: [167](#)

6.1 7: [176](#)

14.1: [172](#)

Homer

Iliad

1.8: [132](#)

1.70: [46](#)

1.259 74: [27](#) [28](#)

2.100 1008: [28](#)

16.799: [14](#)

21.211 12: [13](#)

23.289: [5](#)

23.536: [5](#)

Odyssey

12.439 40: [14](#)

Hyperides, *Or.* 6

27: 182

41.6 42.5: 184

42.5 9: 185

43: 185

Lysias, *Or.* 2

71.6 8: 183

72: 183

75: 184

76: 184

Parmenides (28 D-K)

B8.5 7: 40

B8.19 21: 40

Philistus (556 *FGrH*)

F 2: 33

Plato

Menexenus

246c7: 186

246d1: 186

247c5 6: 186

248b5 c2: 186

Meno

71e: 52

Protagoras

322a: [158](#)

322a b: [158](#)

326d: [49](#)

337d: [178](#)

Protagoras (80 D-K)

A1: [45](#) [46](#)

A3: [45](#)

B1: [47](#)

B4: [48](#)

Pythagoreans (58 D-K)

B1a: [41](#)

B33: [42](#)

B34: [42](#)

Sextus Empiricus

Adv. Math.

7.65: [50](#)

10.181: [56](#)

Pyrrh. 1.218: [47](#)

Sophocles

Antigone

332 33: [155](#)

353 61: [155](#)

361 64: [156](#)

365 67: [156](#)

538 39: [94](#)

566: [94](#)

Oedipus the King

1213: [70](#), [94](#)

fr. 301: [70](#)

fr. 918: [70](#)

Strabo

8.4.10 [28](#)

Thucydides

1.1.1: [32](#), [111](#)

1.1.1 2: [113](#)

1.1.2: [113](#), [141](#)

1.12.4: [162](#)

1.21.1: [134](#)

1.23.1 2: [142](#)

1.23.4 5: [123](#)

1.23.5: [123](#)

1.24.1: [124](#)

1.24.5 7: [125](#)

1.25.1: [125](#)

1.29.5: [126](#)

1.30.3: [126](#)

1.31.2: [127](#)

1.32.1: [127](#)

1.36.1: 128

1.36.2: 128

1.42.1: 128

1.42.2: 128

1.44.1: 129

1.49.4: 130

1.49.7: 130

1.55.2: 124, 131

1.56.1: 131

1.70.2 7: 144

1.122.1: 144

1.140.1: 147

2.2: 30, 114

2.16: 174

2.28: 20

2.36.2: 182

2.39.4: 102

2.40.5 2.41.1: 102

2.42.34: 190

2.44.1.1: 187, 189

2.44.1.3 5: 187

2.44.2.1 3: 188

2.44.2.2 5: 188

2.44.3.2 4: 188

2.44.4.1 4: [188](#)

2.45.1.1 2: [187](#)

2.45.1.2 4: [188](#)

2.45.2.4: [187](#)

2.58.2: [137](#)

2.58.2 3: [137](#)

2.61.1: [147](#)

2.61.2 3: [147](#) [48](#)

2.64.3: [103](#)

2.64.5 6: [104](#)

2.65.9: [149](#)

2.83: [6](#)

2.84: [6](#), [6](#)

3.36.4: [140](#)

3.36.5 6: [140](#)

3.37.1: [149](#)

3.38.1: [148](#)

3.38.7: [148](#)

3.89.5: [136](#) [37](#)

4.1.1: [114](#)

4.17.4 5: [146](#)

4.18.3: [146](#)

4.21: [146](#)

5.19: [30](#)

5.20: [33](#)

5.26.5: [115](#)

5.89: [143](#)

6.18.2: [145](#)

6.18.6: [145](#)

6.83.2: [143](#)

Tyrtaeus

fr.5 West: [28](#)

Xenophanes (21 D-K)

B18: [156](#)

B34: [156](#)

Index

accident, [85](#), [88–92](#)

Aeschylus

Agamemnon, [67–69](#), [86](#), [93](#), [103](#), [107–8](#)

Eumenides, [69](#), [86](#), [88](#)

Libation Bearers, [69](#), [86](#), [96–97](#)

Oresteia, [4](#)

Persians, [69](#), [86](#), [88](#), [93](#)

Prometheus Bound, [93](#), [152–55](#), [175](#)

Agathon, [66–67](#)

almanac, [18](#), [21–22](#)

Anaxagoras, [43–44](#)

Ancient Medicine, [11](#), [151–52](#), [165–80](#), [191](#), [194](#)

Anonymus Iamblichus, [171](#), [177](#)

Antiochus of Syracuse, [112](#)

Antiphon, [10](#), [37](#), [57–64](#), [172](#), [190–91](#)

Archilochus, [7](#)

Archimedes, [194–95](#)

Aristophanes, [14](#)

Birds, [14](#)

Clouds, [1–2](#), [25–26](#)

Ecclesiazusae, [14](#)

Frogs, [100–101](#)

Aristotle, [4](#), [13–14](#), [46–47](#), [50](#), [93](#)

Arnott, Geoffrey, [90](#)

Arrowsmith, William, [2](#)

Bakhtin, Mikhail M., [85](#)

blind alley, [90–92](#)

calendar

council's (administrative), [19–20](#), [22–23](#)

lunar (festival), [18–19](#)

solar, [10](#), [23–27](#), [192–93](#)

Callippus, [22](#)

Carroll, Lewis, [62](#)

change of mind, [93–94](#), [129](#), [139–41](#), [193](#)

Chrysippus, [47](#)

Cleisthenes, [19](#)

Cogan, Marc, [141](#), [145–46](#)

Cole, Thomas, [174](#), [194](#)

conjunction, [20](#), [36](#), [193](#)

Connor, W. Robert, [117](#)

consolation, [182–90](#)

Critias, [159–61](#)

Csapo, Eric, [8](#)

Ctesibius, [15](#)

Darwin, Charles, [2](#)

dating

by epoch, [10](#), [32–36](#), [193](#)

by generations, [28–31](#)

by officials, [30–35](#)

by Olympiads, [33–36](#), [193](#)

Demetrius of Phaleron, [5](#), [31](#)

Democritus, [21](#), [54–58](#), [63](#), [163–66](#), [174](#), [177](#), [179](#)

Demosthenes, [185–86](#)

Dewald, Carolyn, [115](#)

Diodorus, [163–64](#)

Diogenes Laertius, [45–47](#)

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, [34](#), [132–34](#), [183](#)

Dionysius of Syracuse, [24–25](#)

Dissoi Logoi, [48](#)

Dodds, E. R., [3](#)

Edelstein, Ludwig, [7–8](#), [170](#)

Edmunds, Lowell, [143](#), [145](#)

Empedocles, [42–43](#)

enargeia, [5](#), [117](#), [212n32](#)

Ephialtes, [15](#)

epitaphios, [4](#), [101](#), [181–90](#)

Eratosthenes, [34](#)

Euctemon, [21–22](#)

Eudoxus, [22](#)

Euripides, [4](#), [10](#), [66](#), [71–110](#), [141](#), [149](#), [160](#), [193–94](#)

Andromache, [74](#), [77–78](#)

Children of Heracles, [92](#)

Electra, [71–72](#), [75–77](#)

Hecuba, [78–79](#)

Helen, [72–73](#), [89–92](#), [95](#), [99–100](#)

Heracles, [79–85](#), [90–91](#), [98–99](#)

Hippolytus, [71](#), [87](#), [95](#), [99](#)

Hippolytus Veiled, [100](#)

Ion, [71](#), [90](#), [92](#), [104–7](#)

Iphigenia among the Taurians, [91–92](#)

Iphigenia at Aulis, [73](#), [78](#), [93](#), [107–10](#)

Medea, [4](#), [74–75](#), [89](#), [94–95](#)

Orestes, [4–5](#), [87](#), [91–92](#), [95](#), [101–2](#)

Phoenician Women, [92](#)

Trojan Women, [77–78](#), [87–88](#)

Finley, John, [136](#)

Fraenkel, Hermann, [7–8](#)

funeral speech. See *epitaphios*

future shock, [2](#)

Gorgias, [50–54](#), [60](#), [183](#)

grand narrative(s), [2](#), [8–9](#), [34](#)

Griffin, Jasper, [86](#)

Hecataeus, [29–30](#), [112](#)

heliotrope, [24–25](#)

Hellanicus, [30–33](#), [112](#), [114](#)

Heraclitus, [39–41](#), [57](#)

Herodotus, [3](#), [13–14](#), [29–31](#), [112](#), [118–24](#), [129](#), [132](#), [134–36](#), [138–39](#), [142](#)

Herter, Hans, [169](#)

Hesiod

Theogony, [154](#)

Works and Days, [17–19](#), [21](#), [27](#), [37–39](#), [152–54](#)

Hesychius, [45](#)

Hippias, [33–34](#), [178](#)

Hippodamus of Miletus, [157](#)

Homer

Iliad, [5](#), [13–14](#), [27–28](#), [120](#), [123](#), [132](#)

Odyssey, [14](#), [77–78](#)

Hornblower, Simon, [145](#)

human agency, [7–9](#), [156](#)

Hunter, Virginia, [7](#), [142](#), [163](#)

Hyperides, [182](#), [184–85](#)

incident, [85–88](#)

indeterminacy, [5–7](#), [62](#), [91](#), [115](#)

Jouanna, Jacques, [169–70](#)

Kahn, Charles, [39](#)

kairos, [47–48](#), [52–53](#)

Kallet, Lisa, [188](#)

kata theon, [35–36](#), [193](#), [199n22](#)

kinesis, [141–42](#)

Kitto, H. D. F., [116–17](#), [149](#)

klepsydra, [14–17](#)

Knox, Bernard, [94](#), [105](#)

Leyden, W. von, [112](#)

Loraux, Nicole, [4](#), [8](#), [182–83](#), [189](#)

Lucretius, [163](#)

Lysias, [183–84](#), [187](#)

Marx, Karl, [2](#)

materialism, [55](#), [61–63](#), [161–64](#), [179](#), [214n51](#)

measured-through day, [16](#)

Meier, Christian, [7](#), [179](#)

Menander, [193–94](#)

Menander Rhetor, [188](#)

Meton, [21–24](#), [192](#)

Miller, Margaret, [8](#)

Mohanty, Satya, [9](#)

Morrison, James V., [117–18](#), [149](#)

Moulton, Carroll, [193](#)

Nicomachus, [26](#)

noumenia, [18–20](#)

Orwin, Clifford, [145](#)

Ostwald, Martin, [145](#)

Parian Marble, [31](#)

Parmenides, [40–42](#)

parrhesia, [100](#)

parts of time, [46–47](#), [51](#)

Phaeinos, [21](#)

Pherecydes, [29](#), [112](#)

Philochorus, [32](#)

Philostratus, [53](#), [62](#)

Pindar, [191](#)

Plato, [4](#), [43](#), [46](#), [157–59](#), [171](#), [186](#), [199n15](#)

Plutarch, [62](#)

presentness, [7](#), [85](#), [93](#), [104](#), [116](#), [129](#), [141](#)

Prodicus, [171](#), [191–92](#)

progress

modern concepts of, [3](#), [153](#)

narratives of, [7](#), [11](#), [151–80](#)

Protagoras, [45–50](#), [119](#), [157–59](#), [177](#)

prytany, [16](#), [19–20](#), [22–23](#), [25](#)

Pythagoreans, [41–42](#)

Romilly, Jacqueline de, [7–8](#), [45](#), [65–66](#), [171](#), [192](#)

Rusten, Jeffrey, [182](#), [190](#)

Sartre, Jean-Paul, [79](#)

Sextus Empiricus, [47](#), [55–56](#)

shadow (indicating time), [14](#)

solstice, [17–18](#), [20–24](#), [26](#)

Sophocles, [4](#)

Antigone, [89](#), [94](#), [155–57](#), [161](#), [165](#), [175](#), [179](#)

Electra, [97–98](#)

Oedipus at Colonus, [86](#)

Oedipus the King, [69–70](#), [86](#), [88–89](#)

Philoctetes, [91](#), [94](#)

Women of Trachis, [70](#)

spatium historicum, [3](#), [112](#)

Stoics, [4](#)

Strabo, [28](#)

sundial, [17](#), [35](#), [199n13](#)

surprise, [6](#), [88–90](#), [92–95](#), [132](#), [141](#)

suspense, [5](#), [92](#), [96–98](#), [124](#), [126–27](#)

techne, [166–70](#), [172–78](#), [194](#)

Thucydides, [3](#), [5–7](#), [10–11](#), [13](#), [20](#), [23](#), [30–36](#), [101–4](#), [111–50](#), [161–63](#), [168–69](#),
[173–74](#), [181–82](#), [187–93](#)

Thurii, [157](#)

Timaeus of Tauromenium, [34](#)

Tolstoy, Leo, [115](#)

Toffler, Alvin, [2–3](#)

Tyrtaeus, [28](#)

undecidedness, [85](#), [92–95](#), [141](#), [193](#)

Untersteiner, Mario, [51](#), [53](#)

Vernant, Jean-Pierre, [3](#), [4](#), [8](#), [65](#)

Vidal-Naquet, Pierre, [8](#)

vividness. See *enargeia*

water timer. See *klepsydra*

Whitehead, Alfred N., [44](#)

Xenophanes, [156](#)

Xenophon, [192–93](#)

year

lunar, [19–20](#), [26](#)

seasonal (tropical), [17–18](#), [20–22](#), [26–27](#)

Zeno, [40–41](#)